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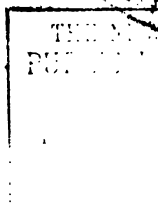
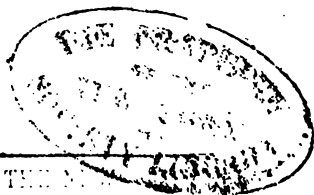
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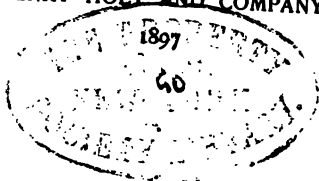
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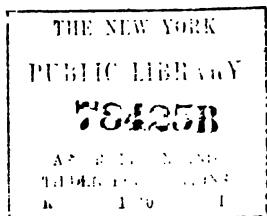
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# SPANISH CASTLES BY THE RHINE.

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## Part 1.

### THE CRISIS IN OLDENDORF.

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#### CHAPTER I.



I was about seven o'clock in the evening of a day in the latter part of May in the present year. I was wandering about, in a lazy sort of manner, through the narrow, irregular streets of an old German town, which I had reached on an extensive bicycle tour. I meant to lose myself, and I had done so. The surroundings were totally strange and unfamiliar to me, and I had no definite idea of the way I had come or of the direction I must take to return to my lodgings.

The town was Oldendorf, a place of twenty or twenty-five thousand inhabitants. It did not belie its name, either; for a more antiquated, venerable, mediæval rookery I had never, in all my experience, seen. Oldendorf, as everyone knows, or should know, is the most important town or city in the small German principality of Anheusen Schwartzburg. Everyone knows, or should know, also, that Oldendorf is and always has been the hereditary seat or residence of the rulers of Anheusen Schwartzburg—the princely family of Anheusen-Sachs; the living and reigning representative of which at the present moment is his serene highness, Prince Ernest Otto von Anheusen.

There was also a princess, her highness Stephanie von Anheusen, the niece of Ernest. I had seen them both, a few days before, upon some state occasion, in the state coach; but it was at a distance, and I had only been able to note that the prince was stout and elderly and glum and that

the princess was young and fresh and lively.


The evening was gusty, but the air was mild, and now and then there came a sprinkling of rain, for which I did not care, as I had enveloped myself in a worn and picturesque cloak which bad weather could not harm. Several of the streets through which I passed seemed almost deserted. Here there were rows of empty warehouses with broken windows and decayed timbers; here a great house with the roof half fallen in, standing in an acre of ground which had run to weeds; there a row of untenanted dwellings, with curious gabled fronts and upper stories projecting over the street—houses that must have been built before the Thirty Years' War.

History says that at one time, in the fifteenth century I think it was, Oldendorf contained a population of sixty thousand. I could well believe it when I saw so many deserted shops and houses. With the decrease in population, however, there has come

no change in the manners or customs of the people, or in the general appearance of the streets or buildings. They are a conservative set in Oldendorf, and I think that if Gustavus Adolphus should come marching through the city to-day, as he did in 1632, he would recognize the place and the people at once without any trouble.

I had set out upon this night in question with the spirit of adventure rife within me. I was like a boy in a story book, who wanders out to seek his fortune, or like the knight of old who journeyed forth in quest of daring deeds. There was something in the romance of the strange, quaint old town which made me feel as if I would like something to happen which was quite out of the ordinary. There was something in the gusty air of the spring night which roused my blood as if it smote me on the cheek.

I felt as did Don Quixote when he and Sancho found the oarless boat



moored to the shores of the river Ebro. If I had found such a boat on this night, when I was strolling through the city of Oldendorf, I would, like him, have stepped into it and, casting off the moorings, floated down to the enchanted castle to find the beautiful and persecuted princess.

Presently I seemed to have come upon a street which was on the outskirts of the city. Upon one side the houses were few and far between, and what houses there were seemed to be uninhabited. Upon the other side there was nothing but a wall—a wall some two or three hundred feet in length and twelve or fifteen feet in height. I crossed over to this wall and walked along beside it and saw that the top was indented throughout its entire length with embrasures, and that every fifty feet or so there rose from it a small round turret. The wall was almost covered with ivy and was full of holes and cracks, so that I thought it must have existed for centuries.

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It did not stand flush with the street but about fifteen feet back from it. This space of fifteen feet was filled by a sort of ditch or gully half choked with weeds and stones, and was separated from the street proper by an iron picket fence about three feet high.

I walked along this iron fence for some distance until I came to a place where it turned in at right angles and ended at the wall. Here there was a wooden bridge over the ditch which led to a small but solid-looking door, beyond which the fence was continued the same as before.

Having nothing better to do, I passed over the bridge and stood before the door in the old wall. It was strongly built of oak and was hung with great, curiously wrought iron hinges, worked into many a scroll and leaf and flower; but that which interested me most was a motto engraved upon the stone cap above the portal, which read as follows: "Who enters here leaves hope behind."

Of course the inscription was not in English, but in old German text, and I could give it here in the original, as I am a perfect master of the German language, as also of several other tongues; but I think that such exhibitions of erudition are not pertinent to the story and, to say the least, are out of taste.


In my adventurous spirit there was something about this door and the inscription over it which met my views exactly. Evidently I needed not to seek further. There was a whole world of possibilities behind that door. It might well be that behind it I should find the lovely and suffering princess of whom I was in search. When one comes to think of it it is always through a door that one goes to his fate. By entering some door a man takes the first step by which he becomes a drunkard or gambler. By entering another he meets the woman whom he is to love. Through one doorway he enters upon a career of fame; through another that of ig-



nominy. Should I or should I not pass through that fateful portal? I little thought then that the question was to be solved, not by myself but by circumstances over which I had no control; that I should enter the doorway without intending to do so and in a perfectly involuntary manner.

While I was engaged in these reflections I heard a crackling of twigs and rustling of leaves as though made by footsteps, and looking up I saw a man coming toward me along the wall inside the iron fence. He was approaching from a direction opposite to that whence I myself had arrived, walking upon a narrow path between the masonry and the ditch, and it seemed to me that he must have come around the further corner of the wall, which corner was perhaps sixty feet distant from the bridge and the doorway.

He came up as far as where the fence turned in toward the wall and stood there, looking at me over the



pickets with a most supercilious and insolent expression. He was a man of forty, I should think, tall and broad and rather heavy about the waist. He had bushy black brows and small ferret eyes. His under lids were puffy, and a great military mustache with waxed ends but ill concealed a large and ugly mouth. The expression of his countenance, as he stared at me, seemed malevolent in the extreme. He was doubtless ill-pleased to find me in that particular spot at that particular time. His dress was of a soldierly cut, though he was not in uniform. He kept one hand in his pocket and, with a riding whip in the other, flicked the dirt from his boots, looking up at me now and then with a glance which seemed to say: "Why don't you take yourself off? Can't you see that I am waiting for you to go?"

Now, if he had not come, I probably would have left the bridge in a moment or so and proceeded on my way along the street, as I had, to tell

the truth, no real, cold-blooded intention of forcing my way through that door, but when I saw, or thought I saw, that he was so anxious to have me go, I immediately changed my mind and began to mature plans by which I might remain on that same spot for an indefinite period—days, months if necessary. I also assumed an appearance which indicated my intention. I took on a look of leisure, I made it seem as though time was no object to me. I yawned, took out a cigar and slowly lighted it, and then leaned in a comfortable attitude against the stone frame of the doorway.

He at length lost patience and spoke to me in a voice which quivered slightly with suppressed eagerness or rage or both: "My good fellow, there are reasons which make your further presence here, just now, rather awkward. I hope you have satisfied your curiosity about the door, and I bid you good-evening and hope you will have a pleasant walk."

He leered at me patronizingly as he said "my good fellow," and it was really more than I could stand.

"Why, my dear old gentleman," I answered, "I am not in the slightest hurry to go. To tell the truth I had thought of spending the night here. I do not object to company, however, and you may remain here with me, if you wish."

"Young man, I do not wish for your company and you will do very well without mine. These grounds are private and the property of a very exalted personage. You will do well to take my advice and go at once."

"Your advice," said I, "is without doubt excellent, and I will take it into consideration. I would like to know first whether you speak by authority of this same exalted personage, and whether he knows that you yourself are here."

I had evidently hit the nail on the head this time, for he betrayed some uneasiness and glanced furtively up and down the street. Time pressed

him, without doubt, for he showed a disposition to hasten matters by beginning to threaten and bluster.

"Fellow!" he cried, "I will have no loiterers about here. Either go at once, or I will take steps to compel you."

"Take your steps at once," said I. "I shall be delighted to see them; but first had I not better help you over the fence?"

Ever since we commenced to talk his rage had been growing on him, until now his face was purple, the veins stood out on his forehead, and his eyebrows had come together in a malignant scowl. To get at me he gripped the fence with both hands, raised one foot and set it between the pickets, and lifted himself up that he might spring over to my side.

Now, the iron pickets of the fence rose six or seven inches above the rail; they were about four or five inches apart and at their tops were wrought to the shape of arrow heads, with good-sized barbs projecting



“‘FELLOW!’ HE CRIED, ‘I WILL HAVE NO LOITERERS  
ABOUT HERE.’”—P. 12.

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downward and sideways. He had placed his foot between two of these pickets and, in preparing to step down on my side, he suddenly lost his balance and fell sprawling at my very feet.

This wasn't the worst of his misfortune either, for his boot had slipped backward as he fell, and his ankle had gone down past the barbs and had become inextricably fastened between the pickets, just as if he were in the stocks.

He tumbled about on the floor of the bridge and raved and swore in the most <sup>in</sup>artistic way—after the manner of Germans; he tried to raise himself up like a cat—he pulled this way and that—he tugged like a bull—he fumed and frothed, but it was all of no use. The fence had been made by a good, honest blacksmith and held him fast. Several articles came out of his pockets during his struggles—a pocketknife, a memorandum book, a snuffbox, and one or two other small things. I picked them up, meaning

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to hand them to him when he should become more composed, but just then his coat came down over his head and he presented altogether such a ridiculous, outrageous spectacle that I laughed till my sides ached.

And now comes a very curious thing. During my merriment I had incautiously approached too near this chained wild beast, for he suddenly reached out and caught my ankle with a ferocious grip. I exerted all the strength I was capable of and wrenched myself loose, but in doing so I lost my balance and hurled myself, like a stone from a catapult, against the door in the old wall.

Have you ever seen Harlequin in "Humpty Dumpty" dive headlong through the partition? Well, that is exactly what I did at that moment. I felt myself strike the door and the next instant I was in utter darkness, sprawling at full length on what seemed to be a stone pavement. As I was shot through, it seemed to me that a light flashed and disappeared,

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but I thought that I might perhaps be mistaken. I rose and sought for the door and found it. I felt a great, heavy latch and tried it, but the door was immovable. It was evidently hung with a strong spring and fastened with a spring lock. It was ajar when I struck it; it had opened to admit me and had immediately closed again and made me captive. Just at that moment, out of the darkness close beside me, there sounded a tit-ttering or giggling such as young maidens give utterance to on almost all occasions, and a voice of very sweet and pleasant timbre spoke to me:

"You came in here very quickly, sir. I hope you did not harm yourself?"

"Oh, no, not in the least," said I. "In fact, I always enter a door in that manner. To tell the truth, I prefer it."

"Well, then, there is no harm done," said the voice, "excepting that you have put out my candle by open-

ing and shutting the door so swiftly; but I suppose we can find our way very well in the dark, so come along, for the princess is waiting for you."

## CHAPTER II.

"AH, HA!" said I to myself, while my heart beat a little faster than its wont. "Here is the princess, after all. Adventures come to him who seeks them, and the age of enchantments is not past by a good deal. Now, an ordinary young man might say to himself: 'It is not you whom this princess is expecting, but Count von So-and-so, or Baron von Something Else, and, if you take the place of the expected visitor, you will be thrown out for your pains.' But I shall not be governed by any such low and servile considerations. John Wentworth Jenkins of New York, U. S. A., shall be as good as any count or baron of them all; so here goes. All I have to do is to see this princess, who doubtless needs my

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"AND SO WE SET FORWARD TO FIND THE  
PRINCESS."—P. 17.

services, let her have her own way about everything and contradict her not, keep up a good nerve, and take everything for granted."

These reflections were made in the twinkling of an eye. "I shall not keep her highness waiting long," I answered my attendant. "But, as I am somewhat unused to this passage, will you kindly reach me your hand and I will follow you at once."

"Here it is, then," said the voice, and I felt about me in the pitch darkness of the place and caught hold of a soft, warm little palm, not so small either, but a good hand to get tight hold of and to squeeze a little, if necessary; and so we set forward to find the princess.

We went about forty steps and came to a door, which my guide opened. We then seemed to be in a sort of long corridor or passage, with a low vaulted stone roof. Some small amount of light streamed through the cracks of a doorway at the further end, by aid of which I

could make these observations. I suppose I could have got along now without help, but I still kept hold of the hand, and perhaps pressed a little tighter. I could also note an answering pressure now and then.

We ascended four or five steps to reach this further door and, on opening it, we found ourselves in a large chamber. This apartment had several windows, but the dusk had come, so that the light was still imperfect. I could now, however, note the appearance of my companion. She was a pretty girl of about eighteen or nineteen years of age, with a trim form, long braids of blonde hair, and a retroussé nose. She snatched her hand away from me and went on ahead through another door, casting back at me as she went a look of pertness and coquetry.

The next room we entered was lighted by candelabra, as, in fact, were all of the further apartments through which she took me; and so we went on, up and down stairways,

through corridors and suites of apartments, and large salons, till I thought there was no end to it; and all this time I had not seen a soul beside the girl with the turned-up nose. As we proceeded, the furnishings and decorations became more elegant. One large salon was hung around with dingy life-sized portraits of bewigged and powdered old dignitaries and soldiers; another seemed ghostly and fearsome with suits of armor and old spears and swords and blunderbusses and banners.

At last we entered a suite of chambers in which the belongings seemed more tasteful and more feminine. "Here," said I to myself, "is where I meet the princess"; and I was not mistaken. The apartment into which I now followed Melanie, for that was the girl's name as I afterward discovered, was small and cozy; it was hung and furnished in soft blue and garnet, and was absolutely full of exquisite pictures and ornaments and objects of luxury. In the center of the room



was a small table with a cover laid upon it for two, with linen of dazzling whiteness, and a profusion of silver utensils of quaint and antique pattern.

Melanie motioned me to wait where I was, and going to a small archway which communicated with another chamber said, in a respectful tone, to someone there:

“He is here, your highness.”

I had removed my cloak and made quite a presentable appearance in the jacket and knickerbockers of my bicycle costume. It was picturesque if not conventional. In a moment or two there sounded the rustling of silk and of dainty lingerie, and a lady of great beauty stood before us.

She was young, not over twenty years of age at most; and she was rather tall, and her figure, though somewhat slender, was graceful and rounded in its outlines. In striking contrast were the wavy masses of her dark brown hair, the limpid gray of her eyes, and the soft whiteness of her skin. Her face was oval, her features

small and perfect. She was in evening dress and her arms and neck and shoulders were like the marble of a statue. She was somewhat haughty in her manner, and there seemed to be an air of melancholy in her face, which was apparent even when she smiled, as she did now.

She acted for a moment as if irresolute or hesitating, and then gave me her hand and said:

"My dear Baron, you did well to come at once."

I bent low and pressed my mustache against the coral tips of her small fingers and answered:

"You would have seen me sooner, your highness, could I have managed it."

She took her hand away from me before I was half through with it.

"Herr Baron, do you know that you are most imprudent?"

"I have been thinking the same thing, your highness, for the last five minutes."

"It was expressly understood that

you were not to come before dark, and your carriage drove up half an hour ago in open daylight and took up a position among the shrubbery of the park, where everyone with half an eye could see it. You are certainly not yourself to-night, Herr Baron."

"Your highness is right, as usual," I murmured submissively.

"When I gave my word, I did not intend that the affair should be advertised as you seem to wish it. One would think that you never planned an elopement before; or perhaps it is an everyday matter for you to run away with a princess?"

"I can assure your highness that it is not," I answered, for I had made up my mind that, no matter what, I would adhere strictly to the truth.

"I thought that your conduct needed a reprimand, and for that reason, and also because I wished to make certain further stipulations as to the programme, I had Melanie send word to you in your carriage by one of the grooms that you should come

to me at once by the postern door in the Bürgerschlacht wall. I hope that now you understand matters fully."

If I had said that I understood anything at all about it I would have lied, so I was silent.

"I also thought," she continued, "that you might not object to some slight repast with me before we start; so pray be seated and I will defer my injunctions until afterward."

So saying, the princess glided into one of the chairs at the small supper table and I, nothing loath, sat down opposite her. She touched a bell and Melanie stole noiselessly into the room and prepared to attend us.

Now those of my readers who have enjoyed a *petit souper en tête-à-tête* with a real flesh-and-blood princess, at the same time beautiful and young, and only those, can imagine my feelings on this occasion.

The reader naturally asks what does all this thing mean? I think that the question is a very proper one. In fact it is the very question which

I put to myself as I sat down to table with the princess. I stated the case to myself as follows:

' This lady has arranged to elope with a certain baron whose name I have not yet discovered. She imagines or pretends to imagine that I am the baron—memorandum, to ascertain, as soon as possible, my name. As she takes me for the baron she, of course, has never seen him. How could she arrange to fly with a man she had never seen? Two answers to the enigma immediately suggest themselves: First, the whole thing is a hoax, of which your humble servant is the dupe; second, the princess has wheels in her head. These seemed to me at the time the only possible explanations, but, to anticipate the dénouement, I afterward found that neither was correct.

Just at this moment the thought occurred to me that the real baron, the man whom the princess intended to fly with, was no other than my friend in the stocks. He had been in-

structed, while waiting in his carriage, to go around and enter the postern door in the Bürgerschlacht wall, and he was obeying the commands of his highborn lady love when he met me. He was, without doubt, still groveling on the floor of the bridge, with his heel held fast between the fence pickets, while I was taking his place beside the fair innamorata. What a turn of the wheel of fortune! The thought of the contrast was too much for my equanimity, and I shook with half-suppressed merriment.

The princess looked up at me and spoke rather sharply:

“What are you laughing at, sir?”

I described the whole occurrence as perfectly as I could, taking care to suppress mention of the spot where it had happened. I perhaps added to the narrative certain unimportant innovations of my own. It could do no harm and they certainly made the story more interesting. Her highness was good enough to be immensely amused at my description. She

laughed merrily at it several times, her melancholy air disappeared little by little, and I thought that I began to gain some headway in making her acquaintance. To tell the truth I was getting to be extravagantly jealous of the man, and it gave me exquisite pleasure to put another spoke in his wheel and to make the princess laugh at the baron, even though she did not know she was laughing at him.

### CHAPTER III.

SOME of my readers will doubtless wonder what we talked about all the time that we were at supper. This is a very natural question, considering that I had never seen her before and that she had never seen me before, that she thought that I was someone else and that I knew that she thought so. I was, of course, anxious not to show my ignorance of matters of which the baron would be supposed cognizant, and I therefore confined myself to letting her know that I

thought her charming. I did not tell her so in so many words either, but strained my ingenuity to the utmost to see how many times and in how many ways I could express it to her without exactly saying it; and I think that I discovered at least fifty such ways. Flattery, if given with delicacy and discretion, has always pleased and will always please pretty women, and I think that I did not suffer in her opinion by the use which I made of it.

She on her part occupied considerable time in explaining to me the relationship which existed between the Anheusens and the Hohenzollerns; they both being descended from a common stock. It is needless to say that I could not dispute her conclusions in the matter, even if I had wished to. To support her position she read extracts from the *Almanach de Gotha*, a copy of which work she caused Melanie to bring her. I thought to myself, "Here is where I find out who I am."



"Your highness will pardon me," said I. "The authorities which you have quoted from the *Almanach* are without doubt correct. I wish to call your attention, however, to the fact that of late years many inaccuracies have found their way into this book. To illustrate what I mean, will you have the kindness to turn to that page of the volume which contains my name?" She turned over the leaves and presently said:

"Here it is: 'Pilsener,' 'Johann Wolfgang,' 'Wilhelm Augustus.' No, it must be further down. Ah, I have it now. 'Ludwig von Pilsener, born 1856.'"

"Look at that," I exclaimed. "Do I look as if I were born in 1856?"

"You certainly do not seem anywhere near that age," she answered with a critical look over my person.

"I should think not," said I with some warmth. "I was born in 1866, and I naturally object to having ten years added to my age by a careless type-setter. That is what I meant

by the errors in the *Almanach de Gotha*."

When we had come to the coffee and Melanie had retired, the princess leaned back in her chair, looked at me intently for a moment, and said:

"Well?"

"Well?" said I.

"Have you brought it with you?" said she.

Now, as I said before, I had made up my mind to stick to the truth, and therefore I could not say I had brought it with me; if I had said I had not brought it she might not be pleased. I therefore chose a middle course and answered:

"I have not brought it with me, your highness, but I can promise that it will be forthcoming without fail at the proper moment."

The princess bit her lip and seemed somewhat vexed.

"I see, Herr Baron, that you are as much of a diplomat as ever."

"I was never more of a diplomat

than now, your highness," I answered with a gallant bow.

"At all events," said she, "you must have it with you at St. Estephe, or I do not marry you. The agreement was that it was to be handed to the mayor before the ceremony, to be by him given to me immediately afterward."

"The exact terms," said I, at the same time wondering what was this mysterious something upon which she set so much store and which played such an important part that nothing could go on without it.

"And now," she continued, "as to the other conditions. You must recollect that most of our negotiations have been conducted by means of your secretary or emissary, Jarno; that I have never talked to you except at the masked ball a week ago, and that I have never really seen your face till now. I thought, therefore, that this was the proper occasion for asserting my wishes in the matter."

"Your wishes shall be law, your highness."

"In the first place you are to drive me to-night across the frontier to St. Estephe. The distance, I suppose, is about ten miles."

"More or less, your highness."

"You are to take me immediately to the Maitre D'Armes and, leaving me at the door, you are to put up elsewhere. The marriage ceremony is to be performed by the mayor of St. Estephe at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Can I trust you to do as I wish?"

"Your highness," said I, placing my hand upon my heart, "I will be your devoted servant in all things." And I spoke truly, for I had taken a great fancy to her and I felt that there was nothing I would not do to serve her.

"The world may condemn me for making a runaway match, but your conditions were marriage or nothing, and as we couldn't be married here there was nothing for it but to elope. It will be considered, of course, as morganatic; of that you are aware.

There is nothing further to be said. I will take a glass of wine with you, and then we will start."

Saying this the princess arose and stepped to a cabinet in that part of the room that was back of me. I heard the tinkle of glass and, happening to turn my eyes toward a small Venetian mirror on the wall at my left, I saw that it reflected her every movement and that I could watch her without her being conscious of it.

She had filled two wineglasses from a decanter and now, with the utmost surprise, I distinctly saw her produce from her corsage a tiny silver-mounted phial, from which she poured several drops of some colorless fluid into one of the glasses.

"The baron is a lucky man, after all," said I to myself.

The thought of Lucrezia Borgia came to my mind as I watched the reflection of the princess in the mirror. As she stood in front of the cabinet her profile only was visible, but in that way the perfection of her

lithe figure was most apparent. This, the somber loveliness of her features, the contour of her neck and shapely head, and her attitude and gestures formed a most beautiful picture, to which her occupation gave an intensely tragic interest.

She seemed to pause, to hesitate for an instant; she looked toward me and passed her hands before her eyes, then she seemed to form a sudden resolution. She took the glass into which she had poured the drug and dashed its contents over the floor, filled it again with wine, and came around and handed it to me.

I arose and bowed to her, and, saying: "To your happiness," I drank the sparkling contents at one swallow. Then, as I put down the glass, I remarked: "I fear there is poison in it, but if there is, it is too late."

"Poison!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean?" and the soft whiteness of her face became crimson.

"The poison of your glance," I said. "The reflection of your eyes

in the wine, which no man can brave unharmed."

She looked at me for a moment with a curious, questioning glance, and then smiled in a bold, daring way.

"I am ready now, Herr Baron, to run away with you; that is to say, if you still adhere to your resolution. I have only to change my gown to a traveling suit and I will be with you. Wait for me here."

Saying this she swept out of the room, giving me a backward look over her shoulder as she passed through the door, in which there seemed to be a mixture of archness and of malice.

Left to myself I, of course, tried to think the affair out, but, as may be readily imagined, I found it a very serious problem. When I was first introduced into the presence of the princess I thought, as I before remarked, that the whole matter was a joke. It was in this way that I justified myself in permitting the lady to take me for the baron. If I was the

subject of a hoax I was certainly right in entering into the spirit of the thing and thus making the scheme recoil in some measure upon the heads of its inventors. I thought of Bakbarah, the barber's second brother, in the "Arabian Nights"; the youth who was enticed by the old woman into the palace of the grand vizier, where he was at first petted and bamboozled, then buffeted and pinched by the beautiful lady and her slaves. In the words of the barber, "He knew not, poor fellow, that the ladies of our great and powerful lords amuse themselves by making such fun as this with any young man who is silly enough to trust himself in their hands." The case of the barber's brother and myself seemed analogous, and it occurred to me that I was certainly at liberty to humor my eccentric hostess and that it behooved me, at the same time, to be upon my guard, lest I should be overtaken with misfortunes similar to those of the unlucky Bakbarah.



I had now been with the princess for an hour, and her manner, her words, and her actions had operated a complete change in my ideas. I no longer thought that my reception was a huge joke. I saw that she was serious and in earnest, and I reasoned it out in my mind something in this fashion: That the princess had been in some way indiscreet, that the scoundrel of a baron had got some hold upon her, and that, through threats or undue pressure, the unfortunate and lovely creature had been induced to make a runaway match with him. There was only one flaw in my chain of reasoning; she had never seen him, it is true, but she had talked with him at the masked ball. How was it that, after hearing my voice, she could still suppose me to be the baron?

I blessed the luck which had brought me to the door in the Bürgerschlacht wall before him, and I resolved that it was my duty to aid her in every way in my power, and never

to leave her side till she was free from his machinations. The best procedure, as it seemed to me, was to humor her present design of eloping. I would thus be in the very heart of the business and could strike a blow at the proper time. In fact, I saw no other way of remaining with her at all. Thus, instead of engaging as I thought in a wild and light-hearted frolic, I found myself plunged all at once into the vortex of an exciting and fantastic tragedy.

In the incredibly short space of fifteen minutes the princess reappeared, accompanied by Melanie. She had changed her evening gown to a very chic and dainty traveling suit, with a somewhat short skirt, a tight-fitting jacket, and a soft gray felt hat with a feather in the side. Melanie was also attired in traveling costume, and carried a small handbag and several wraps. I was very much surprised at this.


"Is Melanie going with us?" I exclaimed.

.

"Certainly, Herr Baron! Did you suppose for an instant that I would go without her? And besides, you know that that was part of the agreement."

"Oh, of course," said I with as good a grace as possible. "You must pardon me for not thinking of it, but, as you yourself remarked, I am not exactly myself to-night."

I wondered, at the same time, what other agreements that confounded Baron Ludwig von Pilsener had made for me. Melanie was a trim and pretty girl, to be sure; at least I had thought so, before seeing the princess; but running away with two women was not the same as running away with one, by a good deal; it took away a great part of the romance of the thing, and I would not have the same opportunities for protecting the princess as I would were she to be alone. It also occurred to me, for obvious reasons, to wonder whether the baron's carriage had seats in the inside for more than two



persons, and what disposition we should make of Melanie in case it did not. I was willing to submit to the inconvenience of riding three on a seat, at least with my present two companions, but I drew the line when it came to sitting on the box with the driver.

"Well," said the princess, "we are ready, and the quicker we go now the better. I forgot to tell you that after I sent for you I also got word to your coachman to leave the conspicuous place in which he was posted and to drive around into the small street or lane which is immediately under my apartments. It is very dark there, and nobody will see us go. I doubt whether your own coachman will be able to recognize you."

"It is all one to me if he does not," said I.

With that we started; Melanie going first, her mistress next, and I bringing up the rear. We passed through the door opposite to that which I had first entered, then

through two or three apartments, went down a staircase, turned a corner, went through a corridor, down another narrow staircase and arrived at the street door. Melanie opened it with a key which she had brought with her and we passed out and found ourselves upon the street. That is to say, I supposed it to be the street, but it was really so dark that I couldn't have sworn to it.

The indistinct outlines of a close carriage appeared near by out of the darkness. We advanced toward it, and as we did so the driver dismounted and opened the door for us. It was raining quite steadily now, and the night was so black that I could not distinguish the coachman's features. I was also positive that he could not tell me from the baron. I handed the princess in and was about to do the same by the girl.

"Melanie!" spoke the princess from the depths of the coach. "I have forgotten an umbrella. Run in and get one."

Melanie turned and darted up the steps.

"And you, Herr Baron, why do you not come in out of the rain? If you are dripping wet, what is to become of us, who must travel with you?"

I did not make any difficulty about the matter, but got in at once. It was as I had feared: the carriage had but one seat. I was still standing and revolving the matter in my mind when, suddenly, the question was settled for me by the driver, who, as soon as he saw me step inside, slammed the door to, leaped upon the box, whipped the horses, and drove away at a furious pace. The sudden start upset me and seated me forcibly beside the princess.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Now the seat was rather narrow for two persons, so that I was brought much closer to her than I would have presumed to get under other circum-

stances. The touch of her shoulder against mine and the wafting of some soft stray locks of hair across my face, as the jolting of the carriage brought us together, had a delightful charm for me, and I felt that I would like to have it go on forever. It could not be, however, and I reached up to pull down the sash that I might stop the coachman. The sash would not come down. I tried the one on her side. It was alike immovable.

"Your highness," said I, "the windows will not open. Shall I break the glass and make that idiot of a coachman stop?"

"It is immaterial to me," she answered, "whether you break it or not; excepting that, if you do break it, I will get wet, which I should not like. You do not wish Melanie to go with us, and perhaps it is just as well."

"But, your highness," I protested, "you must not think that it is by my orders that that dolt of a driver has gone off without her. He shall re-

turn for her, if you wish it. I will discharge him this minute, if it pleases you."

"I can take care of myself very well alone, and so you will find, Herr Baron. Let it go as it is."

There was nothing more to be said, and I was secretly pleased at the outcome of it.

There was the romance of the thing to be considered. Running away with the princess was something daring and piquant, but with two women there would be a good deal of the wholesale element, and it would resemble too much the rape of the Sabines.

Now, all this time I was sitting squeezed up as far as possible in my own corner of the vehicle, that I might give my fair companion as much room as possible. I am naturally very respectful toward women. I might even call myself chivalrous; in fact, I have very nice notions on the subject. The idea, therefore, never occurred to me to take advan-



tage of the opportunity, and become in any way familiar or obtrusive. There was something also in this lady's rank, her manner, and the serious purity of her loveliness, which would have forbidden the advances of the rankest churl.

Feeling this way, therefore, toward the princess, I was the more surprised that she did not seem at all to shrink away from me, as I did from her. She seemed rather to edge over, by slow advances, more and more to my side. When the jolting of the coach would throw her somewhat nearer to me, instead of retreating, she would keep the advantage she had gained, until, finally, she was as close to me as she could very well be without absolutely reclining upon my shoulder. More than once, I remember, I was tempted to put my arm around her and bring the sweet being still closer. The temptation was a terrible one, but I resisted it bravely, and I was afterward glad of it.

The driver kept his horses at the

same rapid gait as when he started, and we soon passed over what seemed to be a long stone bridge and out of the town. At least I judged we were out of the town because the lights had disappeared, but it was rather dark and raining still, and the moisture on the glass made it impossible for me to give more than a guess as to our surroundings. At one time we seemed to be climbing a long, steep hill, and now we were plunging down the further side of it; then, again, for a long time, a quarter of an hour at least, the road passed through a dense, black forest. Meanwhile I was wondering whether we were on the road to St. Estephe, what kind of a place it was, and whether we would be stopped on the frontier by the customs officials. Von Pilsener had evidently arranged with his coachman to get rid of Melanie, and if he had broken his agreement about taking the maid, he would be very likely to break any other agreement, and take the princess, Heaven knows where.

His man evidently thought that he had the baron inside of the carriage. I could have told him where to find the baron at that moment, and I laughed to myself as I imagined his surprise and discomfiture when he should find he had brought me to St. Estephe instead of his master.

The princess and I did not talk very much during our journey. The creaking and jolting of the vehicle and rumbling of the wheels made it difficult for us to make ourselves heard, and I had besides exhausted all the subjects of conversation, excepting those upon which it was dangerous for me to enter. At one time she asked me if I was quite familiar with St. Estephe.

"I was quite familiar with it, some years ago," I answered, and so I had been, for that was the name of a cheap brand of claret which we fellows had patronized at college.

"I suppose," she continued, "that you know where to find the Maître D'Armes, without any trouble?"

"Oh," said I, "I have left all that to the coachman."

"I noticed, as soon as we started, that you had a way of leaving everything to the coachman, but I do not mind, as long as you keep your agreement about the main thing, the matter about which I spoke to you at the supper table. Remember! it must be produced and handed to the syndic before the ceremony."

"I will do even better than that, your highness. I assure you now, by everything that I hold sacred, that the ceremony shall not take place until I have given it into your own hands. What is the use of making the mayor a party to the transaction? I will give it directly to you, and if I do not, there will be no ceremony."

"You are certainly very generous, Herr Baron. And your present promise is very different from the wording of your previous conditions. I must say that my opinion of you has changed materially since I met you to-night."

"I hope, your highness, that the opinion which you had of me before to-night was not a favorable one."

"It was not, Herr Baron."

In an hour, or it might have been an hour and a quarter after we first started, we saw several lights appear here and there, and we seemed to be coming into a town. We again passed over a bridge, drove some way along a street and made a number of turns; then we seemed to pass through a stone arch; the wheels grated over a winding graveled driveway, and the carriage drew up in front of a building of goodly size, several windows of which were lighted up.

The driver sprang to the ground and opened the coach door. I stepped down upon the path and handed the princess out. At the same time, the doors of the portico of the building were flung open, the light from the vestibule streamed across the road, and a servant in livery stood upon the threshold.

I gave one look at the driver. He was glaring at me with bulging eyes. He seemed to be paralyzed with astonishment. I took the princess up the steps and consigned her to the lackey.

"Take the lady upstairs," I said, "and see that she wants for nothing. I will be up there myself in a few minutes."

When she had disappeared up the winding staircase with the footman, the driver found his tongue.

"The baron!" he cried huskily. "I thought you were he."

"Others have also thought so," said I; at the same time slipping a twenty-mark gold piece into his hand. "I am doing this to oblige the baron. He will be much pleased when he hears of it. What is this building to which you have brought us? It certainly does not look like a hotel."

"Look like a hotel! Why should it? It's the baron's house, of course."

"Look here," said I; "you need not unharness. Keep the carriage

waiting on this spot, as I may want it. Ten more coins like the one I gave you if you do what I wish."

With this I left him and rushed into the house and up the staircase after the princess. I felt that I must get her away with all speed possible. I met the lackey who had shown her up and asked him where he had taken her. He indicated a large reception room at the end of the corridor, and I at once entered and closed the door behind me. The princess was looking out of the window. When she heard my step she turned and confronted me with the look of a caged panther. As I advanced, her right hand made a swift movement toward her bosom, and she flashed in my face a bright, narrow-bladed knife.

"Stand away!" she cried. "If you touch me, I will kill you!"

The fire flashed from the depths of her great gray eyes. I had thought her beautiful enough before, but now she was magnificent.

I went a step nearer and held my



"I WENT A STEP NEARER AND HELD MY JACKET  
OPEN."—P. 50.



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jacket open with both hands, exposing my shirt front to the point of her knife.

"Kill me, then!" I said, for I knew well enough that she wouldn't.

She was half ashamed at this, and lowered her weapon and turned away her head; but her emotions got the better of her and she became furious again. Then she began to talk, and I was careful not to interrupt her, but let her have her say.

"You are a villain," she cried; "a contemptible scoundrel! You have broken your agreement, and your word is worth nothing. Is this the Maitre D'Armes hotel? Is this St. Estephe? It is neither the one nor the other. It is your own house, or the house of one of your wicked friends. Do not deny it; it would be useless. And I own it to my shame; I was idiot enough to think there was some good in you. Yes, I was such a dolt that I was commencing to like you. Driveling fool that I was to imagine that, because you were a tall, good-looking fellow, the reports

which I had heard about you could not be true. My folly is what saved you. Yes, if it were not for that and the fear that, after all, you did not have it on your person, I would have given you such a dose in that glass of wine that you would have slept for twenty-four hours. Again, while we were in the carriage, if you had attempted to take the least liberty with me, if you had given the least sign of such a thing, you would have felt this knife in your vitals. I was waiting for it, even hoping for it; but your cold, satanic cunning and prudence, as usual, saved you. I have risked all, and for what? For nothing; for I do not believe that you even have it with you. Ha! you do not say that you have. Then there is an end of it, and I will tell you something now that will disarrange your plans and show you that you are a fool, for all your pains. Learn this—that I am not the princess.”

“Learn this also,” said I, “that I am not the baron.”

## CHAPTER V.

"Not the baron!" she exclaimed, with wonder-distended eyes. "Then who, in the name of Heaven, are you?"

"I am an American, and my name is John Wentworth Jenkins. I was the baron simply because you called me so, as I make it a point never to contradict a lady. Since I have told you my name, will you not be kind enough to give me yours?"

"There is no reason why I should not do so. Sir! I am Hilda von Waldeck, second cousin once removed of the Princess Stephanie. But how was it that you came to me in the baron's place, sir? Did he send you to me?"

"No, Fräulein von Waldeck, he did not send me. If I had gone where the baron sent me, I would be very, very far removed from here. The manner of my introduction to your apartments, in the place of the baron,

is a wonderfully singular story, and I will be glad enough to tell you all about it, when we have more leisure and are in a more proper place for it. You really have no cause of complaint against me. I have obliged you in your every wish. I have kept every agreement, and have, throughout, conducted myself toward you in the most respectful manner. Can you ask for more? To be sure, I have humored you in the mistake you made in taking me for Von Pilsener, but I did it because I thought the man was a dirty scoundrel, and it seemed to me that it was the best way to protect you from his machinations and attentions. I came up to find you now, because I had just discovered that the rascal of a driver had brought us to the baron's house instead of to the Maître D'Armes at St. Estephe. I knew that you would not wish to remain here, and I have ordered him to hold the carriage in readiness to take you wherever else you wish to go. I would like to

thrash the baron at this moment, if only to please you. In short, I wish to call myself your friend. Can I not do so?"

So saying, I held out my hand to her. She hesitated somewhat, and then put her palm in mine, and I gave it a good, hearty, American clasp.

"Of course," she said, somewhat sadly, "I am glad to find now that you are not Von Pilsener. But alas! I have failed in what I undertook. I was doing it all for my cousin, the princess. We were children and schoolmates together, and I would die to protect her. I was to elope with the baron to-night, or pretend to elope with him, that I might simply obtain from him something which is indispensable to the princess' future happiness. I thought he would certainly have it with him, and, if so, I would without doubt have possessed myself of it. I am afraid now that it is lost forever."

"And that is the mysterious something which you continually asked if

I had with me. Can I not know what it is at last?"

"Is it possible that you do not know? Is it possible that I did not once tell you? Why, it was the princess'——"

Just at that moment there was a terrible noise down below, so that she did not finish the sentence she had commenced. An opening and slamming of the outer doors, the heavy tread of feet, quick, sharp questions and answers, and a prolonged and furious volley of oaths, followed by the crash of broken furniture. There was then a stumping around the lower floors, as of a person who was lame, or who had but one leg.

"That," said I in a tone of conviction, "is the baron."

"Are you sure?" asked the quondam princess breathlessly. "If it is so, we must escape at once. After what has happened, he must not find me here with you. If you knew him as I do, you would not wonder why."

She caught hold of my arm in her

anxiety. It was delightful to have her clinging to me, and showing that she had so much confidence in me, and for her sweet sake I could have defied Von Pilsener and his entire household.

"Come with me," said I in tones of magnificent assurance, "and I promise that he shall not even see you." It was useless to think of the carriage. We must find our way out of the mansion, and get away on foot. I took her by the arm, firmly but tenderly, and led her swiftly out of the room and along the corridor, in the direction opposite to that whence we had first come. We entered an apartment at the end of the hallway, and closed the door behind us. As we did so, I heard that dot and carry one step on the main staircase. We were just in time, as the baron was evidently coming upstairs after us. After passing through several other chambers, we found a narrow pair of stairs, by means of which we descended to the first floor. We



then went here and there, seeking a mode of egress other than the main entrance, but in vain, until, at last, I perceived a large French window which led out upon some sort of a veranda or balcony. When I had unfastened it, and we had passed out, I found that we were still some six feet from the ground. Fortunately, she was a courageous girl. I believe she would have sprung from it, rather than go back and face the detestable Von Pilsener. After I had let myself down to the ground, she climbed over the balustrade, and I took her in my arms and set her gently down upon the turf. It was but a moment that I held her, and I willingly would have prolonged it.

It had stopped raining and, the clouds having cleared away to some extent, we could take a very good account of our surroundings. The house stood in the midst of a large park or inclosure, in which were a great many shrubs and trees. With some difficulty we threaded our way

in and out through the bushes until, finally, we came to a thick and impervious hedge. I knew there must be an opening in it somewhere and we did at last find one, though it was quite narrow. I got through it easily enough, but it was with great trouble as to her skirts and her hair that the fair Hilda accomplished it; however, at the end, it was safely done and we now stood upon the street or highway of the town.

Looking back we saw that every apartment of the chateau was being lighted up, in a frantic and furious search for us. While we were gazing, a sash in one of the windows of the second story was flung up, and the silhouette of a broad-shouldered man appeared in the opening. It was undoubtedly Von Pilsener, who was peering into the darkness of the grounds in search of us.

My first wish was to conduct her to some safe and comfortable place where she could pass the night, or where we could procure a conveyance

to take her back to Oldendorf. So we passed along the highway, and after about a furlong, coming to a turn, we took it, and went on quite briskly in this new direction. We seemed to be coming more into the heart of the town. We could see lights in the distance, and we passed several houses, though from their dark appearance we judged them vacant. It was now that I told Hilda von Waldeck the full story of the baron's misfortune and how I came to enter the wonderful door and was taken by Melanie for the baron.

She was delighted most at hearing of Von Pilsener's accident, and regretted that he could not have been held all night. We both agreed that he must have been liberated very soon after I left him, since he had followed us and had arrived in this same place, St. Estephe or whatever else it might be, almost as soon as we.

She agreed with me perfectly as to the weight of the reasons which I gave for humoring her mistake and

personating the baron, and so we came to a very amicable understanding, and it was as if I had known her for a week, instead of for two or three hours.

Though she was quite fatigued from her exertions, and though there had come upon her a reaction from the excitement of the previous hour, yet she walked along swiftly and bravely and was most bright and companionable. I, at last, made her take my arm, and the rest of the way she leaned upon me very trustingly and almost lovingly.

We now came to where the road became more like the street of a town and, happening upon a turn to the left, we took it, for the reason that the lights we had seen lay in that direction. It charmed me exceedingly to hear Fräulein von Waldeck talk, as her voice was melodious, and her expressions original and quaint. For this reason as much as any other, I reminded her that the arrival of the baron had interrupted her before she

had finished telling me what was that mysterious and important object about which, all along, she had been so anxious.

"Why," said she, and she laughed merrily, "is it possible that I did not tell you, after all? Several times I have been upon the point of telling you. It has been upon the tip of my tongue and something has always interrupted me. I will tell you right here and now, so that there will be an end of it. It was the——"

Again the magic word was fated to remain unspoken, and it was I, myself, this time who prevented her from finishing the sentence. I saw something before me at that precise moment which drove all other things out of my head. I grasped her arm and pointed across the way, cutting short her speech at the point where I have inserted the dash.

"What do you see across the street?" I cried.

"A long stone wall," she answered.

"Have you ever seen one like it? What does it resemble?"

"Yes, I have seen one like it. It resembles exactly the old Bürger-schlacht wall."

"It resembles it, because it is nothing else. See, the iron picket fence in front of it, the ivy all over it, the embrasures and turrets at the top, and away off there, almost at the end, is the wooden bridge, and the little oak door, where I entered without intending to do so. What do you make out of this mystery, Hilda von Waldeck?"

"I do not know what to make out of it," she said, with a thoughtful scowl of her arched eyebrows and a pucker of her rosy lips.

"Well, I will tell you all about it," said I, for it had come to me like a flash of lightning. "That infernal vagabond of a coachman has driven us four or five miles out into the country, has taken us over mountains, down into valleys and through forests, and has brought us back to

Oldendorf again and landed us on a spot not a quarter of a mile from the place where we started."

It was true. What a scheme the wicked Ludwig von Pilsener had concocted with his driver! First it was to get rid of Melanie, then to abduct the lady and to immure her in his own chateau in Oldendorf, while she supposed that he had taken her to St. Estephe.

We looked at each other, and at the same moment burst out laughing.

"What will you do now?" I asked. "Of course you know where to find the narrow street or lane into which we came from your apartments. Shall I escort you thither?"

"Oh, it is not necessary. I have with me, fortunately, the key to the door in the old wall, and by that way I can easily find my way to my chamber."

As I accompanied my beautiful friend (for I knew by that time, of course, that she was my friend) across the bridge to the small door, my

thoughts were those of curiosity and of pleasant retrospection. On the pickets of the fence, which had so splendidly done their office in gripping Von Pilsener's heel, there were some small remnants, or rather shreds of cloth. This was all that remained to remind me of that very singular, not to say fantastic occurrence.

She produced the key and readily opened the door. I was very sad at the idea of parting with her, perhaps forever, and I took her hand and began to stammer out some kind of an adieu.

## CHAPTER VI.

"Oh, you needn't think that I am going to let you go in that way," said Hilda von Waldeck. "It would be a poor return for your consideration for me and for the real pleasure which I have taken in your society. And, leaving all that out of the question, not a step do you go until you have



heard my story. You do not ask me why it was that I proposed, in the first place, to run away with the baron, nor why I was doing it in the place of and under the name of the princess. You do not ask me why it was that, having this project, I should not know the baron by sight, and why I should think that he did not know me from the princess. You are the most incomprehensible of mortals. A woman, in your place, would already have died of curiosity. I find myself actually obliged to force the knowledge of these things upon you, that I may set myself right in your opinion."

"The reason," said I, "that I have not asked you about these things was that I thought you would tell me about them if you really wished me to know. They have all along seemed paradoxical and inexplicable, and I have been devoured with curiosity to know their true meaning. I will therefore await your explanations with bated breath, and also wish to

remind you that you have yet failed to tell me what it was of the princess' belongings which you were so anxious to secure from the baron's clutches."

"Yes, and this last time," she answered laughingly, "it was your fault alone that I did not tell you. I had it at my tongue's end, and you interrupted me to call my attention to this old Bürgerschlacht wall. To punish you, I vow that I will not tell you what it is until the very last thing; until, in fact, I have told you everything else. If, in the course of my story, it becomes necessary to refer to it, I will use the word 'blank.' So come on, for I am anxious that you should know the whole of this affair before another quarter hour."

I willingly followed her, as you may well believe. You may also believe that I again found it necessary to be led by the hand through those first dark passages, where I had before been assisted by Melanie. There was much more pleasure in it now

than before, and I was in no hurry to reach those regions of the residential palace which were illuminated; for I had in mine the warm patrician hand of the woman I loved. When I say "loved" I do not exaggerate, for, from being her companion through that night alone, I had become deeply, passionately, everlastingly in love with her; and I already felt that I must have her, or that life would be no object to me—and also that I would have her.

When we had arrived in the small and dainty salon in which she had first received me she bade me excuse her, and, absenting herself for a few minutes, she returned to me gowned in a robe that was of a dove-colored silk, something like a peignoir, soft and clinging, and, sinking into the corner of a luxurious canapé, called me to sit beside her. I did so.

She was some time in giving me her narrative, and I shall condense it and set down only that part which is strictly necessary. The following

are her words, as nearly as I can recollect:

“As I told you before, my friend Princess Stephanie and I were play-mates from our earliest years. We have always loved each other devotedly, and are, in fact, more like twin sisters than like cousins. This will explain some things which otherwise would be difficult to believe, as will also the fact that we have always been considered to look somewhat alike, though Stephanie is older than I by two years. Now I must have you know that the princess is virtuous as a saint, and that she is, besides, lively, sweet, and amiable. She is talented and intelligent, but alas! in one direction, about which I will speak later, there is no end to her folly. It is this one failing among her many charming characteristics which led her to commit, not long ago, a most frightful indiscretion—an indiscretion which has already wrecked her happiness, and which even threatens to upset the house of

Anheusen. I was absent at the time with my brother in Paris. The beginning of her misfortunes, which were the result of this indiscretion, was about three months ago. One day she found that she had lost her—lost her blank, as I said I would call it.”

Hilda von Waldeck looked at me with a roguish twinkle in her dear gray eyes, and then continued:

“When she found that she had lost her blank she had no rest day or night; she turned everything topsyturvy, and looked for it everywhere for a week, but it was all in vain; and the worst of it was that, from the nature of it, she didn’t dare let anyone know that she had lost it. Time passed by, and her chief anxiety, which was that someone might find it, was allayed little by little. Then, suddenly, when she felt most secure, certain things happened which could only happen through some person or persons using the advantage which the possession of her blank would

give. The unfortunate girl was not long left in doubt as to the identity of the man who had found what she had lost. It was the Baron Ludwig von Pilsener and I believe no more degraded, cruel, unprincipled scoundrel ever lived. He had the audacity to write her, telling her that he was the author of the events which had so terrified her, that he had her blank in safe keeping, and to offer shamelessly to make terms with her for its return. In an agony of apprehension she immediately wrote me what had happened, and I hastened to her with the wings of the wind. When I arrived I found that she had already had several interviews with Jarno, the emissary and intimate of the baron, a man who is, if anything, worse than his master, and the terms which he had proposed for the return of the princess' blank were no more or less than the hand of the princess. You look surprised, but you must remember that I told you that even the safety of the house of Anheusen was

in the baron's hands. When I tell you these awful and important secrets, it should show you what perfect confidence I have in you. I have only been with you a few short hours, but there has been something in your words, your actions, and your eyes which makes me willing to trust you with everything."

I interrupted her.

"And yet I am afraid you would not trust me with the best of all, with that which would be sweeter than life itself."

She looked perplexed for a moment, then blushed divinely, and continued her story.

"I must now tell you, and this will explain some things which have appeared somewhat strange to you, that the baron has spent most of his life away from the principality, and had only recently returned to Oldendorf, at the time he found the princess' blank. How, when, or where he found it remains a mystery. The princess had never seen him, and she

had good reasons to suppose that he had never seen her, except at a distance. I have never seen the man at all. This being the case, it occurred to me in my great desire to shield my beloved friend that, aided by my resemblance to Stephanie, I might be able to impose upon the baron by substituting myself for the princess, and in some way obtain from him the princess' blank. Prompted by me, Stephanie at last consented, through Jarno, to run away with Von Pilsener. It was necessary, at least, that there should be one interview between the principals. It took place at the masked ball a week ago. She went through the ordeal bravely; the arrangements for the elopement were completed, and through it all he never got a glimpse of her face. You will now see why, when I met you to-night, I supposed you were the baron, and why I was not surprised that you took me for the princess. There is one thing more; I promised to tell you what it was that the prin-



cess lost. I am anxious to tell you, as I am tired of using always that monotonous 'blank.' The one failing of the princess, which I before mentioned, and a frightful and grievous failing I acknowledge it is, is her penchant for gossip. I believe she is insane upon the subject. There is no libelous tale, no questionable episode, no risqué story about the prominent people of the principality which she does not in some way hear and remember. She has stored away in her memory every scandalous incident which has happened in and near the court in twenty years. If this were all, it would be bad enough, Heaven knows; but it is a thousand times worse. She would not utter one of these things for the world; but she is so besottedly foolish that she has, from time to time, written them all, from beginning to end, in her diary. It is this diary that she has lost. Do you wonder at her anxiety? A month after the book had disappeared, some of these scandals which she supposed

known only to herself, commenced to circulate about the court. People began to receive anonymous postal cards accusing them and others of heinous crimes against society. Children were separated from their parents, wives from their husbands. The princess was in despair, even before the baron made himself known to her. She had written in the book some awful secret about her own uncle, the prince; and had pinned to the page a scrap of paper upon which was the proof of what she wrote. It was the fear of the publication of this secret which made her ready to accede to almost anything Von Pilsener asked her. If she could obtain the diary, together with this scrap of paper, the house of Anheusen, at least, would be safe, as the baron could do nothing without it. This is the reason of our frantic efforts to get the diary. I have now told you all. Do you blame me for anything I have done?"

I talked to her calmly at length, and gave her such advice as I could

think of in relation to the matter; but it was poor comfort that I gave her, after all. Then I spoke of myself, and told her how much I had learned to think of her in that short time. I grew eloquent as I proceeded, and said more than I intended to. I told her how perfect and how adorable I thought her, and, finally, to her great surprise, no doubt, there having been such short acquaintance, I asked her to be mine.

She turned away her head and looked to be in melting mood. Then, all at once, she seemed to take a sudden resolution, and she glanced up to me and spoke.

"I shall never marry while the princess is in misery. There is one chance for you, though I fear it is a poor one. Get the princess' diary from the hands of the baron and I am yours."

There was indeed small chance for me if it depended upon that. I rose and thrust my hands into the pockets of my jacket, and looked at her in-

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"SHE THREW HER SOFT ARMS AROUND MY NECK."—P. 77.

flexible yet lovely face. In these same pockets were the two or three articles which had fallen from the baron's coat when he was groveling at my feet, with his heel between the fence pickets. My fingers closed mechanically upon the memorandum book which I mentioned before as one of these articles.

"What kind of a diary was this one that the princess lost?" I asked her.

"Oh, it was quite a small book, bound in red morocco," she answered. "It was one of Stephanie's peculiarities to write a very minute hand, and to condense everything as much as possible."

A sudden inspiration seized me. I drew the baron's memorandum book from my pocket and, handing it to Hilda von Waldeck, said:

"How will this answer?"

She took it with a perplexed air, and opened it and looked at its pages. Then she gave a great cry of joy and sprang up and threw her soft arms

around my neck and kissed me rapturously, for it was the princess' diary.

A month afterward we were married.

## Part 11.

### THE SIX DUMB-BELLS OF CASTLE SCHRECKENSTROHM.

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#### CHAPTER I.

**N**OW like human nature was the nature of that fox who, having through some misfortune lost his tail, tried to persuade all his brother foxes to the same curtailment! The reason of my making this philosophic reflection will appear as the present story is developed.

This is not a study of character, an analysis of motives, an autopsy of ideas. It is simply a narrative, a stringing together of incidents, of rapid changes and swift happenings in the order in which they occurred.

Furthermore, every word, every iota of what I have here set down, is the truth, the bare and naked



truth. Some of these incidents may appear, to the prosaic and humdrum reader, as somewhat startling, as being improbable and inclining toward the supernatural. Startling and fantastic they may be, improbable they may seem, but I hold that they are in every sense and strictly possible, and that they follow exactly and in every particular the immutable laws of nature.

It came about in this manner: I was traveling in Germany two or three months ago, and, in an evil hour, it came into my head to go a hundred miles or thereabouts out of my way to make a call on an old college friend of mine whom I had not seen in several years. That man was Jack Jenkins. In some romantic way he had become acquainted with and married a German girl of noble birth, a certain Fräulein Hilda von Waldeck. It was this insane idea of renewing an old friendship, and this particular idea always is insane, which submerged me in the sea of

troubles from which I barely escaped with life and honor.

Jenkins was the United States consul at Oldendorf, the residence town of the petty principality of Anheusen Schwartzburg. It was at Oldendorf that Jack met and wedded his wife. After the wedding the fair but obstinate Hilda declined to leave the place of her birth, and my friend made the best of it, secured his appointment as consul, and settled down in this sleepy old German city.

Well, I arrived at Oldendorf after a roundabout and tedious journey, and Jack, who expected me, was at the station and gave me what seemed a hearty welcome. For a few minutes I thought him the same frank, rough-and-ready, jovial chap whom I had always known; but I soon began to notice something of a change in him. There seemed, at times, to be a sort of restraint in his manner; there was, it struck me, often a false note in his discourse. He was more subdued and he seemed to have grown ten

years older than he should have grown in the space of time since I had seen him last.

His talk, like the letters he had written me, was all of Hilda. It was Hilda this and Hilda that; there was never a creature like her, and I must go straightway with him and see her. Now, I was not particularly interested in Hilda, excepting as I naturally would be in something which belonged to a friend of mine. My benedict acquaintances have often bored me by detailing the perfections of their wives, and I suppose I have shown that I was bored and have been considered very unsympathetic and brutish; but what is a fellow to do when he knows that these dotards, like the Ancient Mariner, speak from compulsion, and that seven-eighths of what they say is falsehood or only imaginary? I came there to see him, to talk with him about the old times, ten years before, when we bunked together, and I did not care a fig about Hilda; but, of course, I couldn't tell

him so, and therefore he had his way and dragged me off at once to his house to meet his wife.

I shall say very little of Frau Hilda von Waldeck Jenkins, for the reason that she figures quite slightly in my tale. She was tall and not half bad-looking, and I could easily see how a man of my friend's yielding and enthusiastic nature might imagine her to be an angel. I say imagine, because, of course, you know, she wasn't; none of them are, and some of them are quite the reverse.

So much for her appearance. As to her character, well, I will only say that scarce ten minutes had elapsed e'er I felt the most hearty commiseration for John Jenkins. The fact was that he was completely under petticoat rule. He gave no opinion, made no assertion without meanwhile glancing toward her for signs of her approval. The fact was, as I soon saw, that the man breathed only because he thought that it was her pleasure for him so to do.

Almost immediately after the first words of greeting, after the first ordinary and necessary remarks and questions, my bachelor position was assaulted by my treacherous friend; and in this he was ably seconded by his wife. He would have it that I must marry at once, and he cited their own beatific condition as an unanswerable and irresistible argument. Would that he could have seen the irony of it!

Not content with extracting a promise from me to the effect that I would think the matter over, they descended to the details and produced from their recollections the names of divers and numerous German beauties, any one of whom would be a proper incumbrance for me. The whole assortment, properly arranged and labeled, was to be shown me upon the following afternoon.

"Not if a train leaves Oldendorf to-morrow morning," said I to myself.

After tea I gladly accepted Jack's invitation to go down to the market place and see a balloon ascension.

"You will not be long, love?" said Frau Hilda in a caressing tone, but with a peculiar glance in her eyes.

"Only an hour, dearest," answered Jenkins, and with that we went out.

After leaving the house Jack seemed to resume something of his old hearty manner, and I began to think that I would be able to take some comfort with him. We threaded a labyrinth of narrow, ancient, and crooked streets, and at length emerged upon the market place, which was almost filled with the people of the town, anxious, like ourselves, to see the balloon go up.

It was about seven o'clock of an August evening. The air was balmy and the dusk was beginning to settle down. I thought it strange, at first, that anyone should make an ascension at this hour, but it was not strange at all, for the balloonist was in the employ of the military authori-

ties, and he purposed to make some experiments with an electric search-light or some other kind of light, or burn some kind of fire, the result of which might be found useful in the military operations of the empire.

When we arrived they had about finished inflating the balloon, which was swaying back and forth above the heads of the people, in about the center of the square. We gradually pushed our way through the crowd until we came quite near to it, and I saw that it was rather small and capable of bearing aloft but one person. After a delay of fifteen or twenty minutes the aëronaut appeared and signified his readiness to make the ascension; but he did not go up. The balloon went up without waiting for him.

It was a laughable accident, but I did not wonder at it. I must rather have been surprised if it had not happened. They had piled a number of bags of sand in the wicker car of the balloon to keep it down while they

were inflating it, and, besides this, they had tethered it to a neighboring post with a rather small-sized rope or thick cord. These precautions they supposed to be perfectly adequate, and they perhaps would have been under ordinary circumstances, but when the balloon was fully inflated and the aëronaut had removed several of the sand-bags preparatory to getting into the car, there came along a smart gust of wind, the great silk dome bobbed suddenly to one side, the rope which tethered the car broke like a piece of string, and the machine was out of reach before anyone had presence of mind enough to seize it.


For some reason or other, probably because it was weighted too heavily, it rose only to an elevation of about a hundred feet; then it floated away over the heads of the populace, first this way and then that way, as different puffs of wind took it; and the crowd scurried along in its wake, with their chins in the air and their mouths open, and a great many ran



up into the buildings and got out on the roofs, with the foolish idea that they might recapture it.

Then it grew darker, and it was impossible any longer to distinguish the balloon from the clouds, and Jack and I, who had followed the rabble hither and thither in their erratic chase, gave the thing up and turned our steps homeward.

Now, for the first time, we thought of looking at our watches, and Jenkins found to his dismay that it was half-past nine o'clock. For two hours he had been parted from his angel, as he persisted in calling her; whereas he had promised to return in an hour. I gave the matter naturally no concern, but with my companion it was different. He fairly led me on a run to his house. On the way he seemed to be distraught and preoccupied, he answered my remarks at random, and it was very evident that there was a weight of goodly dimensions upon his mind. "Why," thought I, "will a man, who is born



to the nobility of freedom, voluntarily, yes, longingly, make a slave of himself to a creature in petticoats, so that he trembles at the anticipation of her displeasure?"

When we arrived at the house, Frau Jenkins received us calmly and with a suspiciously gentle tone. With me she was coldly, but studiously, polite, and I, noticing that her manner had still further depressed my unhappy friend, took leave of the couple with all haste possible, and, retiring to my chamber, threw off my clothes and crawled into bed, for I had had a trying day of it and purposed to get a good night's rest.

It was not to b<sup>e</sup>, for just then the Jenkinse commenced to talk. That is to say, the angel talked and the victim, once in three or four minutes, gave out a faint and submissive monosyllable. Their chamber was evidently next to mine; the partitions were not over and above thick, and I could very well distinguish the tones, the manner, and the inflection,

without the words themselves reaching me. Her voice was low, it was plaintive, but at the same time insistent, and it was monotonous; and, ever and anon, came that one protesting, defensive, and melancholy word from John Jenkins. At ten o'clock I turned over toward the wall, and stuffed the sheet into my ears, and still I heard it.

Their door was opened and closed, and in that moment I heard the words: "Six months ago you would not have forgotten. If I could have believed mother——" The rest of the sentence being lost by the shutting of the door. I arose and paced the floor in vexation, for the dull and wearing murmur of the voice gave no signs of abating.

More than aught else I fear a talking woman, and in my misery I yet gave thanks that I was not tethered to one.

At eleven I flung myself upon the bed and fell asleep and dozed a while, and then the voices stopped, and I


suddenly awoke, as one does on a steamship when the screw stops revolving. I felt a sense of blessed comfort, but it was only for a moment. She was apparently but resting. Once more that stream of words commenced to flow. She was off again. I noticed now that there came no response from the culprit. That meek and deprecating punctuation had ceased entirely. Was he dead? The supposition was most plausible.

At twelve there was no change, and I arose and dressed myself completely and opened the French window and looked out into the night. In Oldendorf some of the best and most aristocratic people lived in apartments over the shops, and my friend's apartments were so situated. My room was in the third story, and the French window, which I had opened, led out upon a flat roof, which was inclosed on three sides by brick walls and the fourth side of which faced upon a street. I had noticed this roof and

this area when I was in my chamber before tea. They seemed different to me now. There was something there which I had not seen then. The area now was almost filled with something vast and globular and vague and vacillating. I stepped out upon the roof and advanced toward this monster which, as I approached, took the appearance of a great yellow rubber ball, twelve feet and more in diameter; and it suddenly flashed upon me that I had found the runaway balloon.

I did not wonder at it, nor was I surprised. It was the most natural thing in the world. The roof was guarded on the street side by an iron fence or railing curiously wrought with leaves and spikes, and the balloon drifting that way, the cordage of the lower part had become entangled in this iron work, so that the aerial ship was safely housed and concealed between these three walls.

My first feeling was one of proprietorship. It was clearly mine by all




the laws regarding salvage and treasure trove. It struck me, somehow, that the first thing to do was to untangle the rigging where it had caught and to get the thing ship-shape. When it was wrecked, so to speak, upon the railing, several of the many cords which held the car had become unfastened or unhooked from the ring or hoop above, and the car had tilted over, and had dumped its contents—eight bags of sand—upon the roof. I righted the wicker car and disentangled several of the cords by which it should have hung and refastened them to the hoop at the bottom of the balloon; then, as it was a warm night and I was somewhat heated by the exertion, I took off my coat and because it was the handiest place, threw it into the car. Very soon there remained but two of the cords to disengage from the ironwork. The straining of the balloon made it so difficult that I threw one leg over the edge of the car and bore my

weight upon it, so as to slacken the cords. Even then I could not get them off. So I took out my knife and reached down and cut them both with one stroke. The balloon was now free. I knew it, because in one second it lifted me about fifty feet above the top of the building.

## CHAPTER II.

THIS was not what I wished or intended. It was also not what I expected; but I did not wonder at it nor was I at all surprised. I should have known that if the balloon could carry eight twenty-five-pound bags of sand or two hundred pounds altogether, that there would be no difficulty about its getting away with me, who weighed something less than a hundred and seventy-five. The only trouble was that I did not think of this fact until I had cut those last two cords and all at once found myself floating over the housetops with one arm and one leg



thrown over the edge of the car and with both hands tightly gripping the rim of it.

It only arose to an elevation of seventy-five or eighty feet from the ground; from which fact I argued that some of the gas had escaped; otherwise, the weight being less, it would have been more buoyant and gone higher.

The wind had now changed, and the balloon jogged along at a pretty lively rate, in a direction which would soon bring it over the market place, from which it had originally started. I now thought I should be more comfortable if I could get into the car, and I made the effort to do so, but it was a ticklish operation, as I had to squeeze in between the cords which held it. Besides this, the car itself tilted over so abominably every time I tried to get into it that I soon gave up the idea and decided to ride it out as I was.

Being resigned to this situation, I now began to feel more at my ease,



and really to find some pleasure in this, to me, novel mode of traveling. There was a full moon that night; but there were many clouds floating across the heavens, so that sometimes the streets below me were lighted up, and at other times were shrouded in darkness. I hallooed at two or three belated pedestrians who were passing beneath me, and, noticing their astonishment and dismay at being thus hailed from the clouds above their heads, I took pains to accost others in the same manner. Two old ladies, who were plodding homeward by the light of a lantern which one of them carried, were so startled by this diabolical summons from the upper air that they dropped the light and took to their heels as if they were competing in the Olympian races.

In about five minutes I had passed beyond the town in a southerly direction, and in four or five minutes more I began to float above a dense black forest which seemed limitless in extent. I had heard of a great forest


thereabout, containing many square miles—a forest which was the domain of a strange and fierce old German noble, the Graf von Schreckenstrohm. This was undoubtedly it. It had descended to him directly from an ancestor who had lived in the thirteenth century; a feudal baron, who bore the sobriquet of “the wild boar of Schreckenstrohm.” It was also said that the present Graf von Schreckenstrohm had inherited not only the forest and the great feudal castle which stood upon an island in the midst of the Schreckenstrohm, but also the peculiarities which gave to his ancestor that playful nickname.

I was thinking about these matters as I sailed along, at the rate of about twelve miles an hour, over the tops of the fir trees and pines. I was also thinking about Jack and his wife, and wondering what they would suppose of my sudden and unceremonious departure. I also wondered whether Mrs. Jenkins was still talking, and the thought of that made me quite con-

tented with the peculiar situation in which I found myself, though I was getting tired and felt very lame from sticking to the same position and having to hold on so tightly; and would willingly have got off at some way station and rested until the next balloon came along.

After I had passed over the tops of the forest for a mile or so I became conscious of the sound of a roaring river, which increased in volume as I proceeded. Then there seemed to be a break in the woods, and I saw beneath me the glittering white foam of a mad and mighty torrent. At the same time there rose before me, from a rocky island in the midst of the flood, a great, half-ruined, mediæval castle, with round towers and turrets, with keep and barbicans and parapets galore. Gray and stern and specterlike it loomed up before me, and it seemed as though I was about to pass directly over it.

The direction which I was now taking would bring me immediately



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'I BEHELD HIM COOLLY SITTING IN THE CAR OF THE  
BALLOON.'—P. 99.

above a wide embrasured parapet, which stretched between two towers. At its present altitude, the balloon would clear it by but a few feet. I at once decided that this was the way station I was looking for, and that I would alight there. When I was within fifty feet of it I beheld a man in his shirt-sleeves, standing behind this parapet and watching me approach. Some persons might have been astonished at this, but I did not wonder at it in the least. There was no reason why he should not be standing on the roof of this castle at midnight, in warm weather, if he wished.

As the balloon came up to him, he sprang up and caught hold of the car. At the same moment, I dropped like a cat, upon all-fours, upon the roof. When I arose and turned to accost him, I beheld him coolly sitting in the car of the balloon, which was already passing over the battlements at the further side of the castle. I ran across the stone platform to the edge,

and called out to him that he had my coat, and that he must come back. He waved his hand to me with exaggerated politeness. Then I shook my fist at him, and he laughed immoderately and shouted back, just as he was disappearing, that I might use his.

I was not surprised that the man had gone off in the balloon. There was nothing to wonder at, for he might have had his own peculiar and sufficient reasons for doing so. At the same time, however, I did not go to the length of supposing that he had climbed up on the top of the castle with the express purpose of watching for balloons, and with the idea of taking the first one that came along.

I now noticed a doorway opening upon the platform, from one of the great round towers before mentioned. The door was ajar, and I thought that it was probably by this means that the man had come out upon the roof. I went to this doorway and looked in.

At first, it was as dark as Erebus, but my eyes becoming accustomed to it, I perceived that there was a faint light coming up from somewhere below. I could also make out the outlines of a spiral staircase leading to these lower regions. Not being of the mind to remain where I was all night, I groped my way down these stairs, the light growing brighter as I proceeded, until, after descending, as it struck me, about thirty feet, I came to another open doorway, through which I entered a great square bed chamber, furnished and decorated in the style of some age long passed away. The bed was a large four-posted, canopied affair, draped with heavy silken curtains. The tiled chimney-place was big enough to roast an ox, and the walls were covered with stamped leather and with dingy tapestries, which flapped and undulated in a ghostly manner, with the current of air that came down the stairway. Upon a massive table of black oak, in the center of the room,



stood a silver candelabrum, with four wax candles, three of which were burning. A half unpacked portmantau lay open upon a chair; several masculine garments were scattered about the apartment, and these, together with a strong odor of tobacco, showed that the chamber had been lately occupied. From this, to the conclusion that its tenant had been the man who had gone off in my balloon, was a logical step. A brown velvet coat was among the garments already spoken of. This was undoubtedly the coat he had bade me use in place of mine. I tried it on and found that it fitted me very well, which was not surprising, as the man appeared to be about my size. I should mention the fact, also, that I gathered from the short acquaintance I had with him, that he was about my age.

There was only one thing that I now wanted, and that was sleep. I wanted it badly and I wanted a great deal of it. So without more ado I


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flung myself upon the feathers of the great four-poster, and almost immediately fell into a sound and dreamless slumber. When I awoke, the sun was shining brightly through a narrow, deeply embrasured window, high up on the wall opposite me. I looked at my watch and found that it lacked but a few minutes of ten o'clock. I arose and dressed hastily. I could hear the surging of the Schreckenstrohm, as it swept past the castle, but no sounds of life from the building smote upon my ear. This struck me as rather singular, and made me more anxious to reconnoiter the premises. With the well-appointed paraphernalia of my predecessor I made a careful toilet; for the reason that I had become a guest of the castle under what might be considered somewhat peculiar circumstances, and I wished to create as favorable an impression as possible, upon my first appearance.

When I had finished, I summoned to my aid what small stock of effron-

tery I was possessed of, and entering the staircase of the tower and descending to the story beneath, I passed into an apartment directly under the one I had occupied. This room was light and airy and from the view which I got from the windows, I now judged that I was upon the ground floor. This chamber seemed to be devoted to implements and trophies of the chase. Several pairs of antlers, some of them of enormous size, were posted above the doorways; the head of a wild boar, with glistening tusks, was mounted above a cabinet in the further corner, and upon one of the walls was displayed an assortment of muskets, bell-mouthed pistols and blunderbusses and hunting pikes and blades, so ancient and curious that it would make a collector burst with envy to look at it.

Without lingering to inspect them, I opened a door opposite to the one I had entered and found myself in what appeared to be the refectory of the



castle. The walls were covered with landscape paintings, as it seemed to me from a cursory glance, by the best German artists of the seventeenth century; but that which most pleased my fancy was a breakfast table in the center of the room, spread with linen of snowy whiteness, set with a profusion of silver, and best of all, furnished with a collation, smoking hot, and evidently prepared for one person.


As I entered here, I was certain that I saw a door close at the farther end of the room. I stepped quickly to this door and opened it, and looked down a long passageway without seeing anyone. Then I went along this passage and entered several pantries and offices, still without coming upon a living thing, and I began to be perplexed, for all this time I had not heard a sound, save the dashing of the torrent against the rocks outside, and I was not accustomed to being waited upon by ghosts. I now concluded that the closing of the opposite

door, as I entered the room, was done by the pressure of air. As I pushed one door open the other one closed. That was all there was of it, and it was a most simple thing.

I was not surprised when I found the meal already prepared and waiting for me. There was nothing to wonder at. It had, without doubt, been gotten ready for the man. When they heard me moving about in my chamber, they supposed he was coming down and had placed it upon the table. I had his coat upon my back, and it seemed to me eminently logical that his breakfast should adorn my stomach. With this philosophical reflection, I sat down and made short work of the fruit and coffee and rolls. And though set before me in such a fantastic and ghostly way, very tangible and satisfying and delicious I found them.

After I had finished I lighted a cigar and lounged about the room for ten minutes or so, thinking surely that some servant would come whom I

might interrogate. But none appeared; neither did I hear the least sound indicative of life in that part of the building near me. I then went up in my own apartment, as I had begun to think it, and examined the belongings of its late occupant. On looking at the portmanteau I found that it bore upon the outside the initials: "A. von D., Munich." At about this moment, also, I discovered in one of the pockets of the coat which I wore a letter, the envelope of which was postmarked Oldendorf and addressed to Herr August von Dunkelheim at Munich. I had now discovered without doubt the name of the man who had stolen my balloon, and by reading the letter I felt morally certain that I could find out a great many things about the castle and its inmates, always providing that it had any. I, however, restrained myself from taking the letter from its envelope, reserving the right to do so at some future time, should occasion warrant it.



## CHAPTER III.

COMING out of my chamber, I noticed a door on the opposite side of the landing. I opened it and found myself in a large apartment with stone floors and stone-vaulted roof. Passing through this, I came into a long corridor, similarly finished, in which there were a number of casements or loopholes. Thrusting my head through one of these apertures, I saw ahead of me a great hexagonal tower, thirty or forty feet in diameter; then passing through a doorway at the end of the passage I entered a hallway of hexagonal shape, and from that I knew that I was now in the six-sided tower which I had seen from the window. This hallway was lighted by a shaft from above, and in its center was a winding stairway leading to the lower story. In its six sides there were six doorways leading into as many bedrooms. I examined each of these chambers in turn and

found them all notably alike. The same richly stained mullion windows were in all of them; the same delicately frescoed walls and ceilings, the same luxurious rugs and Louis Quinze movables. In each room there was a quaint and narrow bed with the whitest of counterpanes, the softest of mattresses and the downiest of pillows. I tried one of them, like little Silver Hair in the house of the three bears; then, seeing how I had disarranged it, I felt exceedingly guilty, and with haste, and as silently as possible, I withdrew to my own part of the chateau.

Again descending the tower staircase to the bottom and turning to the left, instead of to the right, I passed through a spacious, vaulted passage, and coming to a great pair of oaken doors, I opened one of them without much trouble and found myself upon a carved stone porch, which led down into a courtyard. In this open space I walked about and surveyed at my ease the castle and its surroundings.




It would be a difficult matter to describe the building, or collection of buildings, as more properly it might be called. It was a conglomeration of feudal Gothic and Moorish architecture; towers round and square, great battlemented walls, turrets and donjon keeps and all that sort of thing. And what made it seem more incongruous was that a considerable portion of it had been remodeled and made habitable in a comparatively modern way. A great part of it, crumbling and discolored with time and almost covered with ivy, looked as though it were a thousand years old, while other parts seemed new and comfortable and showed the marks of present occupancy.

Outside the castle and the court there rose a stone wall about eight feet in height, continuous save opposite the castle porch, where there was a break or gap, some fifteen feet in width, or wider. This gap had originally been filled by two huge gates of wrought and twisted iron, which now,


rusted from their hinges, lay back on either side against the wall. Through this open space I could see the black swirling flood of the Schreckenstrohm go sweeping by; and beyond the water a wagon road that wound up the hill through the forest.

Advancing to this aperture in the masonry, I found some stone steps leading down into the water, and looking up the stream I noticed something else, which struck me as remarkably odd, namely, a rope of iron wire, which, coming from the highest casement in a tall tower, which rose some fifty feet from where I stood, stretched across the river and disappeared in the tree tops of the woods on the opposite side. I climbed to the top of the outer wall, without much trouble, and walking upon it for several hundred feet I passed around the upper end of the castle and of the island, and now was able to get a much better idea of both, and of the plunging river or torrent which swept down, about sixty feet in width,

on either side. I now looked in vain for any means of communication between the castle and the mainland. The flood was so deep and the current so furious, as it pounded against the rocky banks, that crossing in a boat was utterly impossible, and the question of how I was to get away became more and more of an enigma. The island seemed to be about two hundred feet in width and some five or six hundred in length. It was completely encircled at its outer edge by the wall upon which I walked, excepting for the open space I have mentioned. The castle stood at the lower end of the inclosure. By lower end, I mean, of course, the part down stream. And the whole of the remaining ground, for five hundred feet perhaps above the buildings, was covered with trees and shrubbery, very dense in some places, and at one point through the leaves and branches I caught sight of a flower garden, and what seemed to be the white spray of a fountain.



I leaped down from the wall and threaded my way through a labyrinth of foliage, that I might satisfy myself about the matter, and suddenly coming into an open space, a most secluded sylvan spot, there burst upon my gaze a sight which would have surprised me and set me wondering, if such a thing were possible; the sight, namely, of six young damsels, all of them handsome, and two or three of them passing anything I had seen, both in face and figure, in that quality which is called beauty. They were sitting upon rustic seats, or reclining upon the turf. Two of them were reading. The others, in various *dolce far niente* attitudes, were day-dreaming, or gazing at the sky, or otherwise killing time. They were of different ages, the oldest not over twenty and the youngest not less than fifteen. Though each had some trait of feature, color, or expression, which distinguished her from the others, there was that in their general appearance which led me to believe that they



were sisters. They were alike and yet unlike. And that which pleased me infinitely more than all the rest was the fact that they were not saying anything.

They had not noticed my approach, but presently one of them looked up and saw me. She immediately sprang to her feet. This drew the attention of the others to me. A second one followed the example of the first, and these two, hurriedly picking up something from the ground, darted away into the shrubbery. As they fled, I perceived the twinkling of bare white feet, and one of them let fall a tiny shoe upon the grass. Their forms were so sinuous, so perfectly molded, and their motions so quick and graceful, that they seemed more like wood nymphs than like human beings.

The remaining four raised themselves from their recumbent positions and gazed at me curiously and without a particle of alarm. I advanced toward them, hat in hand, and thus accosted them:

"You will please pardon me, young ladies, for intruding upon you; but you are the first persons I have seen upon the island. I arrived here last night, and I wish to pay my respects to the master of the house. Will you kindly tell me where I can find him?"

The four girls simply looked at each other and smiled. Then they gazed at me again, without uttering a syllable in reply.

I thought their conduct somewhat peculiar, but I made as though I did not notice it, and said:

"You are the daughters of the proprietor, are you not?"

All four nodded emphatically, then looked at each other and smiled again.

"The other two who fled as I approached, are they your sisters?"

Once more they nodded simultaneously.

"I have heard that the Castle of Schreckenstrohm stands hereabouts. Can you tell me if this be it?"

They gave the same affirmative sign. Then the one to whom I par-

ticularly addressed my questions, she seeming to be the oldest, turned to her sisters and raised her eyebrows in a sarcastic manner.

"The Herr Graf von Schreckenschrohm is then your happy father. Will you condescend to tell me whether he is at home?"

This time they all shook their heads, and they were so decided about it that I thought they would never get through shaking them. Here was a very odd kind of a reception. I had never had such an experience before. The expression upon the faces of these young women was more than ordinarily intelligent and lively, and they could answer my questions with nothing but nods and shakings of the head. Perhaps they were trying to have some amusement out of me. I would be facetious in my turn.

"Are all the people on the island dumb?" I asked.

For answer, they nodded slowly. They no longer smiled, and their countenances took on a tinge of sad-

ness. When I asked the question, I did not suspect that such was the reality. Their manner now made me think seriously that I had hit upon the truth. But I could not wholly believe it yet.

“My dear young ladies, do you mean to affirm, really and truly, that you are all mute? That none of you can articulate a word?”

They nodded still more sorrowfully than before; and the oldest one, for whom I had begun to have something of a liking, cast her eyes down, and they seemed to be filled with moisture. I had now come to the experience which prompted me to write this story. These were “the six dumb belles of Castle Schreckenstrohm.” In the title, I did not, it is true, use exactly this form of spelling, but it was intentional; for how otherwise could I sum up and picture the chief episode of the narrative without letting the reader into the secret before it was time to do so?

The two younger maidens who had



disappeared at my first approach now returned, properly stockinged and shod, and the whole six—representing every possible charm and beauty which the human female, from the age of fifteen to twenty, possesses—standing and sitting, were grouped around me in a radiant semicircle. I gazed at them one after the other, in ecstatic rapture. Here are six girls, thought I, each one of them in her way as lovely as a dream, not one of whom can speak a word. I remembered the dainty breakfast which I had eaten that morning, and at once the old adage came to me that the perfect woman is she who can cook but who cannot talk. Here was not one perfect woman only but half a dozen of them. The gardinen Predigt of Frau Hilda von Waldeck Jenkins was still fresh in my memory, and I declare, that, if such a thing were possible, I would immediately and incontinently have fallen in love with the whole six.

I was now upon the point of asking

whether they had been born mute or had become so after birth, because I was anxious to ascertain the locality where, and the means by which, such families or races of females were produced—with the idea of giving the information to my friends, for their good and the general benefit of humanity. I, however, refrained from interrogating them upon the subject, as it was a delicate one, and might put them to unnecessary pain.

“Young ladies,” said I, “I am very glad to have you say so. No, I do not mean that, of course I am sorry—that is to say, I am glad that you can, at least, hear so distinctly. It will now give me pleasure to tell you who I am, and to describe the odd way in which I came here.”

The oldest maiden, whom I by this time fancied exceedingly, a tall brunette, with a slender but perfect figure, large, dark, melancholy eyes, a creamy complexion and wealth of dark, glossy brown locks, at this produced from behind her a writing pad

with pencil attached. After tearing off a page which had been scribbled upon, she wrote upon the pad and gave it to me. The handwriting was full of character, and was charmingly feminine. I read as follows:

"We know who you are, and how you came, and the errand upon which you came."

Before handing it to me she had shown it to the girls nearest her. They now watched my face, and glanced at each other with looks of mischievous amusement. I was somewhat nonplused. They were either bent on mystifying me, or they took me for someone else.

"Then," said I, "you have been told by Frau Jenkins, and you saw the balloon last night when it passed over the castle."

The Schreckenstrohm ladies looked wonderingly at each other, and my particular favorite snatched the pad and wrote as follows:

"We have heard nothing from Frau Jenkins, though we are ac-

quainted with a lady of that name in the city. Neither do we know what you mean by that nonsense about the balloon. We know that you are Herr von Dunkelheim, of Munich, and that papa brought you here last night, after we were all in bed."

"Miles. Schreckenstrohm," I cried, "you were never more mistaken in your life. I am not Herr von Dunkelheim. My name is Julius Waterbury. Von Dunkelheim has left the island, and I did not come with your father, and have not seen him."

Her eyes had a strange light in them as she seized the pad and again wrote upon it:

"Then how did you get here?"

Impressively, and with exact detail, I narrated the manner of my arrival at the castle, and of Von Dunkelheim's departure from it. I have never seen incredulity so fully and unmistakably depicted on the human countenance as it was upon the pretty faces of the six countesses. One of them, an ethereal blonde creature of

about seventeen, thrust a little hand into a reticule which hung suspended from her belt, produced a letter, unfolded it and handed it to me—at the same time, with triumphant air, pointing to the opening paragraph with a taper index finger. I took the letter and read aloud the following words:

“DEAREST YSOLDE: I learned to-day that my brother-in-law’s brother, August von Dunkelheim, is to visit you and the rest of my cousins at the castle. As you have never seen him, you will doubtless wish to know something about him. In the first place, you must not believe a word he says; for I know it to be a fact that he is the greatest liar in all Europe.”

#### CHAPTER IV.

I LOOKED up at this point, and caught the maidens smiling at each other and giving that peculiar downward and upward twist of the head which signifies —“right she is, you

may depend upon it." I now turned to the last part of the letter, which read as follows:

"Give my best love to Brunhilda, Wanda, Guttrune, Undine, and Lorelei, and believe me your affectionate cousin,

"ERMENGARDE."

I then looked at the date, and found that the epistle had been written only the day before.

Here was a pleasant situation to be placed in. My narrative and the reputation of the expected guest fitted together too perfectly. In their minds, I was the prevaricator Von Dunkelheim, and I felt that I should remain so, unless some fortuitous circumstance should arise to establish my identity. The villain had not only run away with my balloon and my coat, but he had also stolen my character.

"When and how did this letter come?" asked I, as I handed the

sylphlike and golden-haired Ysolde her missive.

She took the pad from her dark-eyed sister and wrote:

"This morning, by the trolley car."

She evidently meant to pay me in what she supposed to be my own coin. I smiled at her nonsense, and then I asked her another question:

"You said that your papa, Count von Schreckenstrohm, came here last night, after you had all retired. How did he cross the river to the castle?"

"By the stone bridge, of course. You should know, as you were with him," wrote Ysolde.

"But I have been all around the island, and have seen no bridge."

These words of mine seemed to produce a great deal of merriment. Some of the damsels plainly snickered, and one, the youngest of the six, whom I afterward found was Lorelei, a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired little witch of fifteen, actually winked at her sisters.

"Oh, you can't see it now, you know!" were the words which Ysolde now wrote upon the pad.

"Oh, I see!" said I. "The stone bridge is like the trolley car. Now you see it and now you don't. Such a bridge as that is not solid enough for me. Give me a balloon every time."

"Yes," wrote the girl, "but your balloon is nonsense; and the car and the bridge are true. You can see the car yourself, when it comes to-morrow morning; and you can also see the bridge when papa arrives."

"And when is your papa, the Herr Graf, coming, most fair and charming Gräfin?"


"In a week from yesterday, unless something happens; which is not at all likely," was her answer.

I now began to get along famously with the six heiresses of Schreckenstrohm. They were a jolly set, take them all together; though I do not mean by that that they were all of them of a mirthful and waggish dis-



position, like the flaxen-haired and childish Lorelei, or the blonde and nymph-like Ysolde. Brunhilda, the eldest of them all, the maid who pleased me most, was of a serious and contemplative character, her smile was the sweetest, the looks from her unfathomable eyes were the tenderest, and her nature, all in all, like the beauty of her face and form, was more perfect and mature. The next in age, whom I afterward found to be Wanda, was of a languishing and sentimental cast. Then came Guttrune, a black-haired, gray-eyed sibyl of eighteen, and between Ysolde and Lorelei was Undine, as elflike, immaterial, and changful as the creation of Baron Fouqué.

There was a romance, a strangeness, a wildness about the whole affair, which fascinated and enthralled me. The weird and almost miraculous way in which I had alighted upon the spot, the feudal castle, the roaring torrent, and the six beautiful countesses were like the images of a fairy



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"I LAY AT LENGTH UPON THE GREEN TURF."—P. 127.

tale. There was, besides, the charm of that still and shady glade, and a charm in the unfathomable mystery which enveloped the island, the castle, and its occupants. And, above all, there was the charm of solitude, which the presence of these speechless girls made greater than if I had been alone. I was like an Adam in a garden with six voiceless Eves, and I would have been immeasurably content had they not still persisted in believing me to be the recreant Von Dunkelheim.

They wandered with me through the island and with childish pleasure showed me all their favorite nooks and corners. I lay at length upon the green turf, by the hour, and watched their graceful forms and lovely faces, as they strolled past me, or as they sat near by upon a mossy bank. They plucked for me rare, exotic flowers from the garden, and side by side we gazed into the fountain, where, as I now learned to the confusion of the culprits, Lorelei and

Undine were wont to wade barefooted. We then explored the castle through and through. We descended into the bottom of the deepest donjon; we clambered over the tops of the highest battlements; we climbed up into every tower, and we perched ourselves within every turret; so that there was no part of the strange and venerable pile with which I was not familiar. After the abominable injuries which I had suffered at the hands of Von Dunkelheim, I naturally felt no longer any compunctions of conscience about reading his letter. Before the afternoon had passed, watching my chance to open it unobserved, I had made myself master of its contents, and the nature of my discoveries made me glad that I had done so. The letter was from the Graf von Schreckenstrohm; it was dated at Oldendorf three days before, and ran as follows:

“MY DEAR AUGUST:

“Once more I have had to imprison my six daughters in the Castle of

Schreckenstrohm; and there they shall stay until they come to their senses. You know, of course, about their peculiar infirmity. It has grown upon them since their mother's death, until I cannot bear them longer in the house with me. I am determined to marry them off, come what will, and you shall have your choice from the half dozen. It is for this that I have summoned you to Oldendorf. I shall meet you at the station with my carriage and take you immediately to the castle. There you shall stay until one of them, I care not which, consents to become your wife. I have certain claims upon you, as you know, and shall expect you at six on Thursday night.

“SCHRECKENSTROHM.”

I read this letter with emotions of mingled horror and rage. This inhuman monster, so aptly named the wild boar, imprisoned his inoffensive and lovely children in this melancholy castle; treated them like male-

factors, and for what? Solely, forsooth, because their sad infirmity, their lack of speech, annoyed him. I hated him for it from my inmost heart, and I also hated him for the coarse and cruel way in which he had set this Von Dunkelheim upon them. It was like opening the gates and turning the wolf into the pasture after the lambs. The only thing that perplexed me was the question: Why had Von Dunkelheim run away?

When the day had almost gone we dined together, in the same chamber where I had eaten the mysterious breakfast. This was also a strange experience; three damsels on either side of me at table, and I doing all the talking. Here it was that I discovered that there was still another person upon the island: Dame Geiskopf, a deaf and dumb old woman, half servant, half companion or governess, who, in some remote and undiscoverable part of the castle, concocted and evolved dishes worthy of the Trois Frères Provençaux.


Here was a flaw in my theories; the six countesses had not cooked my breakfast, after all. I, however, comforted myself with the reflection that undoubtedly they might have done so had they wished.

Shortly after we had dined we all repaired to a large and magnificently furnished salon adjoining the hexagonal tower of the six bedrooms, and there I passed a most pleasant evening. It is true that the old duenna, Frau Geiskopf, stole into the room a few minutes after we had taken possession of it, and, seating herself at one end of the chamber, bolt upright and immovable, gazed upon us with the unwinking glare of the basilisk. But it mattered little to me, for she was as deaf as the countesses were dumb, and before her very face I made the most flattering and tender speeches to them all; at the same time, however, singling out as the object of my most fervid and affectionate attentions that dark-eyed, statuesque, and thoughtful beauty,



the peerless Brunhilda, with whom, I must confess, I was, even at that early stage of the proceedings, most desperately in love.

The salon contained, besides luxurious Oriental furniture and exquisite paintings, a number of musical instruments—zithers, lutes, and mandolins—from which, at times, the six maidens, singly or by twos and threes, produced for my entertainment the most delightful harmonies. “What a contrast,” thought I, “to the modern function, where one hears only the cackling of a score of shrill-voiced women.” Later in the evening refreshments—fruits and cakes and wine—were brought in and served by Undine and Ysolde; and, as I sat there, half reclining upon a huge divan of some Eastern material, ministered to by these ethereal and silent Hebes—while two or three others of the Siren band clustered around me in tantalizing proximity, and still others struck from zither and mandolin the most heavenly strains



of Schubert and Mendelssohn and Schumann—I reminded myself of Abou Hassan in the “Arabian Nights,” where he finds himself suddenly transformed into the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, and is waited upon and entertained by the twenty lovely odalisques of the five chambers; “Eyes’ Desire,” and “Heart’s Delight,” and “Light of Day,” and all the rest of them.


At ten o’clock precisely the old ogre of a chaperon, Dame Geiskopf, arose and made a motion of authority, and immediately the six daughters of the Graf von Schreckenstrohm dropped their occupations and sprang up and prepared to retire. They gathered round me and took my hand affectionately, and, bidding me good-night in their mute pantomime, followed the duenna out of a small door at one side of the apartment. Brunhilda was the last to go. She turned in the doorway and looked at me with a laughing glance. I kissed my hand to her, and I thought she did the

same to me, but she shut the door so quickly that I was not certain of it.

## CHAPTER V.

ON the morning of the next day I rose betimes and, making a hasty toilet, I hurried downstairs in search of my hostesses. I found them in the courtyard of the castle, and was pleased to notice that their greeting was fully as amiable as was their leave-taking the night before. While I was standing among them saying to them all the pretty compliments and agreeable things I could think of, some great, black, heavy body, or object, or mass darted out of the tops of the forest opposite us, went whizzing and rattling over our heads, and disappeared over the castle before I had a chance to see what it was.

I was not surprised at the transit of this black something; neither did I wonder at it, for I had made up my mind to expect anything, after what



had already happened. I was, however, taken off my guard by the suddenness of it and I cried out:

“What is that?”

The six damsels seemed very much amused at the start which I gave and at my sudden exclamation.

“That,” wrote Ysolde upon her pad, “is the trolley car, about which I told you. If you will follow us up into the signal tower we will now show it to you.”

They pointed out the tower in question. It was the one from the window of which came the wire rope which extended across the river into the forest. The rope itself was even now vibrating as if it had been forcibly shaken. I saw at once the truth of the matter. The car about which they spoke ran along this rope and into the casement of the signal tower. There was truly nothing to wonder about in this matter, for it was really a very simple thing, an ordinary mechanical contrivance and that was all. I now conjectured

whether the invisible bridge might not develop into some equally everyday affair. These last reflections came to me while I was following, as best I could, the six sylphlike forms of the countesses, who had started upon a wild chase or race into the tower and up the staircase, as though each one was trying to get to the top first. When I at last arrived, very much winded, on the uppermost floor, I found them all gathered around a large wicker-work car or basket, about two and a half feet in depth and width and four feet in length. It seemed to be filled with all sorts of merchandise—among which I noticed eatables of many kinds, in quantity enough to have stocked a small grocer's shop, books and stationery, female clothing and finery. It also contained a large bundle of newspapers and letters. This bundle the girls had already seized, and they were now occupied in dividing its contents.

I examined this crate or car, and

found that it hung by two iron trolleys or pulleys upon the wire rope, which, as I mentioned before, came from somewhere in or beyond the forest, extended across the stream and through the casement into the tower. I now found that the end of the rope was securely tied to an iron stanchion let into the wall, and that the car, sliding in through the window till it reached this wall, had become fastened by an automatic latch or catch, which prevented it from running back again out of the window; which it undoubtedly would have done without this contrivance. At this point I may as well state certain other facts about this piece of machinery which I learned afterward. This wire rope aërial railway extended from Castle Schreckenstrohm to the count's villa, the mansion where he ordinarily resided. This mansion, called by the count "Auser dem Walde," was three-fourths of a mile from Castle Schreckenstrohm, stood just outside of the forest, and

was situated about a mile from the walls of Oldendorf. By means of this air-line, daily communication was established between the two places, and it was by this means that the inmates of the castle were supplied with the necessities of life, and at the same time kept in touch with the outside world. At the Schreckenstrohm end it was only needful to unfasten the latch and the car would start of its own weight and run across the torrent and through the forest, all the way to Auser dem Walde. This I knew of my own experience, as I afterward had occasion to try it. To propel the carriage in the opposite direction, namely, from the villa to the castle, required considerable power, and this power was furnished by compressed air, the car being shot out of a window in the villa, like a shell from one of the pneumatic guns of the *Vesuvius*.

The six damsels now seemed to be making a great fuss over some matter which they had found in one of the

newspapers. They clustered around it and gesticulated wildly.


Then Brunhilda, the queenlike, seized it and ran up to me, and the rest followed her, and all six showed by their faces and manner that they had taken a new interest in me and that I was something more to them than I had been up to that time. And the lovely Brunhilda thrust the newspaper under my eyes and pointed out with her snowy and richly bejeweled hand the following paragraph:

“DUSSELBERG, July 18, 189—. Balloon thief arrested. The government balloon, which got away from Professor Schaffhausen at Oldendorf on the evening of the 16th, and which was supposed afterward to have been stolen, was recovered yesterday from the miscreant who ran off with it. He was arrested as he was climbing down from a tree upon which the balloon had caught and gave his name as August von Dunkelheim of Munich. From documents, letters, etc., found



upon his person, it is believed, however, that his name is not Von Dunkelheim, but that he is an American named Julius Waterbury. He was incarcerated, and will be examined more fully to-morrow."

When she saw that I had read it she placed a dainty forefinger upon the words "Von Dunkelheim," then pointing the same finger at me, shook her head several times, and all the other damsels shook their heads likewise. Then, indicating the words "Julius Waterbury," she went through the same pantomime, this time nodding in the most emphatic and decisive manner; and all the rest of the six sisters nodded like so many toy Chinese mandarins. Thus it was that in their naïve and touching way they at last acknowledged their error. Thus it was they showed me that they now believed the necessarily fantastic tale which I had told them, showed me that they no longer identified me with the detested Ananias



whose company had been forced upon them by a brutal and cruel sire.


From this time on, between me and these six ingenuous and amiable creatures there was a perfect understanding; the barriers of conventionality were swept away; the air of reserve, of hauteur, which they had maintained for the supposed Von Dunkelheim, melted like April snow, and I became as much their companion as though I had been with them for so many weeks instead of hours. The difference was most apparent in the charming Brunhilda. She was ever closest at my side, and I flattered myself that the tender glances which I gave her were returned with interest.

I now watched for an occasion fitting for the momentous declaration which I wished to make to her, but there was no time during the day when there were not several of the fair prospective sisters-in-law present. I might have spoken before them all, but I knew that this was not the accepted and ordinary way of doing it.

Therefore, I waited until the evening, and when we were gathered as on the preceding night, in the drawing room, with the sphinxlike Dame Geiskopf watching us—while Wanda and Ysolde were playing Von Weber's "Invitation to the Waltz," I reached over and took Brunhilda's pad from her and wrote upon it the following words:

"In the few hours since I first beheld you I have learned to love you as never mortal maid was loved before. Without you, life would not be worth the living. Write your answer here. Will you be mine?"

Then I gave it to her and watched her as she read it. As she became aware of my meaning her long dark lashes sank and her rosy tint deepened. She looked up at me, and I imagined a melting glance in her magnificent eyes; but she turned her head partly away, and sadness seemed to steal over her features, like the shadow of a cloud upon the meadow, and she wrote something underneath





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my own message, and showed it to me, and I read these lines:

"It cannot be, for we six have vowed an eternal sisterly love. We have bound ourselves by an inviolable oath never to separate while life endures. Were this not so, it might have been, but now it cannot be."

Nothing daunted, I wrote as follows:

"You need not separate. Your five lovely sisters shall live with us always."

She gave one glance at the words, looked into my eyes with an expression in which there was a world of joy and trust and gratefulness and love, and immediately wrote:

"It is enough. I am yours forever."

Before I knew what she was going to do, she made gestures and summoned the other five maidens to her side, and showed them the writing upon the pad, so that all of them, at once, became conversant with the details of my courtship. This was em-

barrassing enough, but what followed was infinitely more trying; for they all, with one accord, flung their arms around her and kissed her and shed copious tears, and wrung their shapely hands, and otherwise gave evidence of the most unconsolable grief. The tears came into my own eyes as I looked at them, but my sympathy was wasted, as I afterward found that they were one and all delighted with the occurrence, and that this was their way of showing it.

The precise old duenna now came forward from the other end of the room, and, not knowing, of course, what had taken place, glared at me, as she would have done had I attempted to assassinate one of the Graf's daughters. Then Brunhilda's five sisters came up to me one after the other and clasped my hand and gazed at me affectionately; and some of them actually fell upon my neck, and at that the patience of Frau Geiskopf was exhausted and she bundled them out of the room, and

that was the last I saw of them that night.

We spent the next day in evolving plans and projects for my speedy union with Brunhilda. I must say here that though my heart had chosen her as its absolute mistress from among the six damsels, yet were the rest of them not by any means displeasing to me. In fact, I had a tender liking for each and every one of them, and the prospect of having them all ever near me was not the least pleasing part of the whole affair. They were like so many beautiful pictures or statues, and as such would grace and embellish my household. The idea of this household, with its silence and its solitude, where I would be alone and yet not alone, filled me with the most pleasurable anticipations.

My first step was to write a long letter to the Graf von Schreckenstrohm, in which I stated fully my intentions in regard to Brunhilda and her sisters, asking his consent to the



arrangement, and referring him, upon the question of my financial and social standing, to the Honorable John Jenkins, United States consul at Oldendorf. In this letter I also advised him of the running away of Von Dunkelheim, and of the manner of my arrival at the castle.

I read this communication to my six fair co-conspirators. They were delighted with it, and insisted on taking and mailing it at once. It was about noon when, with much merriment, they ascended to the signal tower and sent the letter off to the old Graf, at Auser dem Walde. It may well be imagined that we were all on the *qui vive* when the car arrived the following morning. We were up in the top of the tower waiting for it, and pounced upon it the moment it made its appearance. It contained a quantity of female wearing apparel, jewels, and finery, some of it very rich and costly, and, among several letters, was the count's answer to my epistle. I seized it and, tearing open its en-

velope, read aloud to my pretty listeners as follows:

“HERR JULIUS WATERBURY:

“Letter received. Full consent given. Will arrive at eleven o’clock. Bring Herr Jenkins and wife with me. Wedding in castle chapel at two o’clock.

“SCHRECKENSTROHM.”

My cup of happiness should now have been full, but, for some reason or other, I was not as well pleased with the Graf’s answer as I should have been. In the first place it was too laconic, not to say brusque, and I did not like the idea of his bringing Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. The presence of Frau Jenkins would dispel the chief charm of that silent place, and the thought of it jarred upon my feelings. Then again, why should the ceremony take place at two o’clock upon that very day? A week, or even a month hence, would be soon enough. There was something in this rash, indecent

"How will they get across?" said I to Brunhilda.

She pressed my hand, which she still held in hers, as though asking me to wait; and then she pointed toward the river. I looked in the direction she indicated, and at first saw nothing out of the ordinary; a black, voluminous, whirling mass of water, dashing and seething against the rocks of the island; that was all; but in a few seconds a remarkable change appeared in it. It fell away, diminished and sank as I watched it, just as though it were being swallowed up by an earthquake, or, rather, as if its source had suddenly been dried up. Its surface went down actually six feet before my very eyes, and in doing so it exposed and left high and dry a stone bridge or viaduct some ten feet in width, reaching from the gateway of the wall directly across the now comparatively peaceful stream to the point where the party of three were standing. I did not wonder at it, nor did I permit myself to be in any

way surprised. This was the bridge which Ysolde had spoken of. I remembered the simple mechanism of the car, and I had no doubt that this apparent phenomenon would be explained as easily and as satisfactorily. I, however, made up my mind that it should be the first thing about which I would ask the old Graf.

Upon this still dripping causeway, which but a minute before had been hidden by four or five feet of madly rushing torrent, the party now advanced to meet us.

The Count von Schreckenstrohm was first to arrive. Without waiting for an introduction, he seized me by the hand with a grip of iron, and almost wrung my arm off at the shoulder. I had always flattered myself that I was rather strong, but compared with me he had the strength of a steam engine. I had only time to give Jack and his wife a few hurried words of greeting before they were taken possession of by the six young women and dragged away to some re-

mote part of the castle. I was now left alone with the imposing sire of my fiancée. Without delay he led me up the porch, and into the chamber which I have described as being devoted to trophies of the hunt. There we sat down together by the open window where we could look out upon the gateway, the forest opposite, and the bridge; or, rather, the place where the bridge had been; for, when I now looked for it, it had disappeared. The flood of the Schreckenstrohm had risen even while we were entering the castle, and it had vanished as completely as though it had never existed. Fiercely twirling his twelve inches of white mustache, the father of Brunhilda now addressed me as follows:

“My young friend! first of all, I will set your mind at rest upon a matter about which you are dying to ask me; namely, the sinking or drying up of the Schreckenstrohm, a phenomenon which you have just witnessed. I always make it a point to explain this occurrence at the beginning, as

I hate to be interrupted, and I know that sooner or later you will ask about it."

"Herr Graf!" said I. "You are a mind-reader; but pray proceed."

He scowled at me with his bushy white brows, for breaking in upon him, and then continued:

"The affair is a very simple one. It is only a question of diverting the river from its course, and then again confining it to its proper channel. Many years ago I hit upon this plan for doing away with a visible bridge, thus making the castle approachable, or isolating it and making it unsailable at my pleasure. About two miles above here, in the forest, upon my own domain, I discovered a large natural depression or basin, the rim of which was but a few feet from the banks of the Schreckenstrohm. Into these banks I had built a large gate, so that I could at will divert the river into this basin. The power for opening the gate is hydraulic and is furnished by the Schreckenstrohm itself,

and this power is set in motion by an electric current from my villa, Auser dem Walde, and also from this castle. Almost the whole volume of the river flows through the canal into the basin. In about two minutes the electric fluid is turned off, the gate shuts automatically by reason of the current, it having been opened up stream, and the Schreckenstrohm is exactly as it was before. When the gate is open, the bed of the torrent below it becomes substantially empty. The current runs at the rate of eight miles an hour; therefore it will be a quarter of an hour after the operation before the bridge is exposed, and it is exposed for exactly two minutes. I press the button at Auser dem Walde, come leisurely down to the river, find the bridge high and dry, and have plenty of time to cross it before it is engulfed again. That is all there is of it, and I hope you understand it."

"Herr Graf," said I, "your explanation is so concise and lucid that no one, unless he were an idiot, could fail

to understand it thoroughly. Suppose, however, that you were upon this island and the electric current failed to work. What then?"

"*Potz Teufel! Donnerwetter!* Look at the *verfluchten Hund!*" roared the Graf, half rising from his chair.

"What is the matter?" I exclaimed in consternation.

"That fat ox, that camel, that *Spitzbube* of a coachman has gone to sleep on the box. I ordered him to drive back at once and fetch the preacher, and as soon as my back was turned he went to sleep; and it's the third time to-day. *Gott im Himmel!* but I'll waken him."


I leaned forward and looked out of the window and saw that it was as he had said. There stood the coach, drawn up in the identical spot where the party had left it; and the fat driver was really sound asleep upon the box, with his chin sunk upon his breast and a short meerschaum pipe between his teeth. At that moment the sharp report of a pistol sounded within two



feet of my ear; I beheld the coachman's pipe shot out of his mouth and shattered into a dozen pieces, and, turning to the old Graf, I saw him in the act of returning a still smoking revolver, about a foot long, into his hip pocket. As to the somnolent driver he immediately straightened himself up, grasped the reins, and drove off through the forest.

"That was quite a remarkable shot," said I, and I spoke truly, for the meerschaum was a small object to hit at a distance of fully one hundred feet.

"It is nothing," said the old nobleman, with a ferocious and sinister look in his yellowish gray eyes. "The next time I will hit something besides the pipe. And now, in regard to this little matter about which you wrote me. You have asked for my eldest daughter, Countess Brunhilda. You have also expressed a wish that her five sisters should form a part of your household. Herr Consul Jenkins has satisfied me as to your social and



financial standing. I therefore say to you, Herr Waterbury, what I have already said in my letter of even date; take her, take them, and be happy, and if you can't be happy, be as happy as you can."

"Herr Graf!" I answered, deeply moved, "my honored future father-in-law! I know not how to express my thanks."

"Then do not try to express them," said he brusquely. "In the first place, I hate any kind of a demonstration, and, in the second place, there is, as you should know, nothing to thank me for. You understand thoroughly their peculiar and unbearable infirmity. You have been with them here for several days, and you marry them, I should say her, with your eyes open."

"Herr Graf!" I exclaimed, "I am deeply shocked at your remarks in regard to your lovely and unfortunate children, and I must protest against them. I would be no man did I not do so. Their lack of speech, which

you call an unbearable infirmity, is a misfortune which should render them trebly dear to a father or a lover."

"Lack of speech?" he queried with a puzzled air. "What mean you? Have a care, my young friend, for I like not these idle jests. Superabundance of speech is what afflicts them, as you will find. But you are young and brave, and may endure. They had it from their mother, and since her death they have come near to talking me into my grave. It has only been by periodically shutting them up in this castle that I have had breathing spells and have been able to exist. Were it not for their infirmity, I had married them off years since. Not long ago I chose for one of them a husband, Herr von Dunkelheim, an estimable youth of Munich. He was under such obligations to me that he at once fell in with my plans. They would have none of him, and they raised such a storm of words about my ears that I immediately, in self-defense, sent them to the castle

for a week. I informed them at the time that Herr von Dunkelheim would visit them in a day or so, that he might choose one of them for his wife. They at once rebelled, and at the instance of Brunhilda, who is the quickest-tongued among them, by reason of her having had longer practice, they registered a vow that neither of them would utter a word during the week of their imprisonment. It is, of course, impossible that they should have kept their oath. Their week is up at twelve o'clock to-day, and it now lacks but a minute of it. There is no more to be said. The wedding will take place at two o'clock. I have given my word, and that word is never broken."

At that instant, from somewhere in the interior of the castle, there broke upon my ear a strange and discordant noise. I had heard nothing like it before upon the island, and at first I did not know what it was. It grew louder, clearer, and more strident, and at length there was no longer any

mistaking it. It was the storm, the raging tempest, the confusion, and the maddening din caused by a number of strong-voiced females, all speaking at the same moment.

As the father's ear caught the sound his eye glittered, and he exclaimed:

"Their time is up, and they are off again."

I said nothing; but in that one moment I did more thinking than before I had ever done in an ordinary day. I gazed out of the window and beheld the coach coming down the hill out of the wood on the opposite side of the Schreckenstrohm. The head of a clerical-looking man appeared at the coach window. I immediately arose and said to the count:

"You must pardon me, but I wish to go up to my room for a moment. I will not remain there long."

The old Graf granted me permission to withdraw by a magnanimous wave of the hand, and I at once left him and ascended to the landing in

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from Castle Schreckenstrohm to Auser dem Walde, the count's villa. The car traveled at the rate of about fifteen miles an hour, and I rattled along at a tremendous rate through the leaves of the dark and savage forest. As I anticipated when I went out, my speed diminished materially as I went up the incline of the rope where it approached the villa; so that it was very gently and slowly that my conveyance finally passed into the open tower belonging to the count's residence. I had no trouble in alighting from the car and finding my way to the ground floor. There I met a lackey and gave him my card, telling him to present it to his master and to inform him that I would write him from Japan. I have no time to describe the villa. I started out immediately for the railway station at Oldendorf, and half an hour later was speeding away on the train toward Paris. Since then I have heard nothing either of the Jenkinses, or the "six dumb belles of Castle Schreckenstrohm."

## Part III.

### "THE MAN WHO LOOKED LIKE THE KING."

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#### CHAPTER I.



READ lately an account of the singular experience of one Julius Waterbury, who, having attempted to free a stray balloon, which had become entangled with the railing upon the top of the house where he was lodged, was run away with by it, and set down upon the roof of a castle, several miles distant. At the moment when he alighted, according to the same account, a certain August von Dunkelheim of Munich, who happened to be standing upon the roof of this same castle, sprang into the balloon and sailed away, and was arrested, several



hours later, on the charge of having stolen the balloon, as he was climbing down from a tree upon which it had caught—this tree standing in the neighborhood of Düsseldorf, near Munich, and being distant a great many leagues from the aforesaid castle. August von Dunkelheim is referred to in the above account as being the greatest liar in all Europe. He may have been so, up to the period when Julius Waterbury wrote this narrative. After reading the narrative, it seemed to me that we must come to the conclusion that there are others.

Now, the facts are that Von Dunkelheim was not the man who was arrested while climbing down from a tree in the neighborhood of Düsseldorf. The reason why I know this is—that I myself was the man who was arrested; and I now propose to give a succinct and truthful account of the matter; as well as of certain other more important things, which happened afterward.

I am an American, and my name is Stuyvesant Perkins. I come of a very respectable family, and, better still, I am possessed of a fair education. At the death of my parents, which happened shortly after I had left my studies, I inherited some twenty-five thousand dollars, and, upon the revenue of this moderate fortune, I contrived to live quite comfortably until last spring. At that time I set out upon a tour of Europe; which tour, or peregrination, has been productive of the most unforeseen and momentous consequences.

On the 16th of last August, I being then at Krayburg, a small and ancient town in the very northernmost part of the kingdom of Lusatia, that part which thrusts itself wedge-shaped between the German principality of Anheusen Schwartzburg and the kingdom of Bavaria, I received word from my bankers in Boston that a certain manufacturing concern, in which I was interested, had failed, and that my whole fortune had taken to itself

wings and had vanished. They also informed me, incidentally, that my letter of credit was withdrawn and canceled. I now found myself in an obscure and unfrequented part of Europe, without friends, and with just four hundred and fifty marks in my pocket—a sum equivalent to about one hundred dollars of American money.

The only thing for me to do was to return home. If I was to get there at all, I must go at once, and economize in every way possible; otherwise, when I arrived at Hamburg, from which port I decided to sail, I would not have money enough left to pay my passage. In the first place I came to the conclusion that it would be better to walk as much of the way as possible. I therefore had my luggage sent on ahead to Hamburg, and set out on foot, bright and early on the morning of the 17th, meaning to cross the Bavarian frontier, three or four miles to the north of Krayburg, and to push on from there, some

twenty-five miles further, to Munich; which city I hoped to get a glimpse of before dark.

At eight o'clock I had been jogging along, at quite a rapid gait, for an hour or more, and it now seemed to me that I must be in the immediate vicinity of the frontier; particularly as I had just caught sight, from a piece of rising ground, of the towers and spires of the Bavarian town of Düsseldorf. All at once, through the foliage of a grove of oak trees at my right, I got a glimpse of something which seemed very much like a balloon. I immediately pushed my way through the hedge, in order to satisfy my curiosity. When I had gone about a hundred feet, I came to a spot where I could get an uninterrupted view of the object, and I found that I was not mistaken; and that it was, in truth, a balloon, which had caught in the branches of a great tree.

Its car or basket was swaying back and forth, with the wind, some twenty feet from the ground, and, when I had

come quite close to it, I saw to my astonishment that there was a man in it, a gentlemanly-appearing person, who was holding on to a branch of the tree, and in this way steadying the car, so that he would not be rattled out of it by the wabbling of the balloon. I at once understood his predicament. There was not a branch within his reach which would bear his weight, and he could not bring himself any closer to the trunk of the tree; consequently he was for the present a prisoner. When he saw me he hallooed to me, and I of course went at once to his assistance. I found no trouble in climbing the tree, and by bending a branch here and breaking one there we soon managed to get the thing close to a good thick bough, to which we bound it fast. We now sat down upon the rim of the car of his balloon, with our legs dangling on the inside of it. He gave me a very good cigar, and, we having exchanged cards, I found that my host was August von Dunkelheim, of Munich.



"WHEN HE SAW ME HE HALLOOED TO ME."—P. 168.

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A talk of ten or fifteen minutes made us feel quite well acquainted with each other. I asked him what had brought him to the scrape in which I had found him, and his explanation of the affair agreed, in the main, with the narrative of Julius Waterbury, which I saw later. He now wanted to know why I was trudging along on foot, twenty-five miles from Munich, at eight o'clock in the morning. As he had been so frank with me I determined to be the same with him, and told him exactly how I stood; how I had lost every cent of my patrimony, and of the course which I was now taking.

"I am very glad to hear this," said he, with a sardonic grin.

"Are you?" I exclaimed, while I felt an inclination to tumble him backward out of the car.

"Certainly, my dear Herr Perkins! And for this reason: It will give me an opportunity to aid you. You need not frown. I would certainly not aid you unless I would thereby be bene-



fited myself. You see I am thoroughly frank with you. The proposition which I wish to make to you is as follows: There are certain very cogent and peculiar reasons why it is no longer agreeable for me to reside in this country—why it is no longer advantageous for me to go about under the name of August von Dunkelheim.”

“What have you been doing?” asked I.

“Herr Perkins,” he answered with his hand upon his heart, “I assure you, upon my honor, that I have broken no law; unless there is a law that a man shall not make a fool of himself.”

“If there had been such a law then, I infer you would have broken it,” I interposed.

“I should have utterly annihilated it,” said he with decision. “This is the main reason why I would willingly change my name and identity. I have, however, another, which of itself would be sufficient. Have you

ever seen the reigning monarch of this country?"

"I have not," said I.

"Well, you see him when you look at me; that is to say, you see his exact image. We are as alike as two peas. This photograph of His Majesty, Wilhelm Otto, which I always carry with me, will convince you."

He produced a photograph and handed it to me. It certainly resembled him as much as though he had sat for it.

"This unfortunate resemblance is always placing me in absurd and unpleasant situations. What I am resolved to do is to change my name and leave the country. What I propose is to give you twenty-five hundred marks for your name, your identity, and your passport. Of course, you have it with you, or you could not travel in this manner. Your age, height, and complexion approach mine so nearly that it will answer my purpose very well. I would also stipulate that you assume,

in some public manner, the cognomen and personalities which I discard; at least for a few days. And that, during these few days, you remain hereabouts; that is to say, in the vicinity of Munich."

"In other words," said I, "I am to provide you with the means for proving an alibi."

"Not at all, my dear Herr Perkins. I may as well tell you that my object in this is to delay pursuit on the part of my friends until I am safely out of the way. Is it a bargain?"

I considered his offer for a few moments. I wanted the money exceedingly, and my reason told me that, in complying with his terms, I would be giving him *quid pro quo*. So far, it was all right. If the fellow had really committed a crime, I could easily escape the effects of it, by showing that I was not Von Dunkelheim.

"I am agreed," said I. "From this time forth, I am August von Dunkelheim of Munich."

"You are a man of sense and

decision," said he. "Here is the money."

With that he counted me out the sum of twenty-five hundred marks, the most of it being in Bank of England notes.

"I will now proceed to the nearest town," said he, "and fetch someone who will pack and remove this balloon. You will oblige me by remaining here to look after it, until I return. There is one thing more. You will notice that I am wearing an exceedingly well-made Prince Albert coat, of a fine and expensive texture. It is not the garment in which I would like to appear before these country bumpkins. Nor is it a good one to travel in. Would you mind letting me have your tweed coat in exchange for it?" I assured him that it would give me great pleasure to accommodate him, and we at once made the proposed change. Before handing him my coat I was careful to remove what few articles were in the pockets of it. He neglected to do the like by his,

though I did not know of it till afterward. He now descended to the ground, made his way to the road, and shouting out "*Au revoir*" went off in the direction of Düsseldorf.

The rascal never returned for the balloon, and I think, now, that he never intended to do so. I waited an hour and a half, without seeing anybody. Finally a peasant came along, but, as soon as he laid eyes on the balloon, he seemed to be seized with fright, and at once took to his heels. He must have informed the authorities, for a half an hour afterward I saw three officers of the Bavarian police coming toward me from the direction in which he had disappeared. I got down to meet them, and began to explain matters; but they would not listen to the very clear and plausible account which I gave of the affair, and insisted on arresting me and taking me to Düsseldorf.

I have now shown, I think, conclusively and clearly, how it was that I, and not Von Dunkelheim, was the

man arrested for stealing the balloon; and also how it came about that, when arrested, I was wearing the coat of Julius Waterbury.

Though my change of identity had so far brought me worse luck than ever, and though, as a direct result of it, I was under arrest for a criminal offense, I determined, on account of my promise, and also through a sort of natural perversity, to persevere in the course which I had commenced. Therefore, during my examination that morning, while the papers and documents found in my coat made it appear that I was Julius Waterbury, I maintained stoutly that I was none other than August von Dunkelheim.

The theft of this particular balloon being an offense against the government, and the royal tribunal being established at Munich, I was taken that afternoon by train to that city and incarcerated in the Ludwigskerker, a most secure and solid residence, especially devoted to prisoners of state.

About two hours after my arrival,

it being then about seven o'clock in the evening, a turnkey opened the door of my salon, and, telling me that a person wished to see me, immediately ushered a gentleman into my apartment. As soon as the official had gone out and closed the door, my visitor introduced himself as Counselor Wittlesbach, and said:

“*Mein lieber* Von Dunkelheim, we will immediately come to business. My object in visiting you is to concert measures for obtaining your freedom. I act on the part of a lady who is waiting without. Can you not imagine who she is?”

I assured him that I could not.

“She is your wife, sir; Frau Cuni-gunde von Dunkelheim.”

“Guess again!” said I.

“There is no guessing about the matter, *Mein Herr*. The lady has her certificate with her. I suppose you will not deny that you are married to her, though I admit that there might be found extenuating reasons for doing so. You will also not deny

that she advanced you fifty thousand marks before the ceremony. The marriage, she admits, was a secret one, and you have not yet formally acknowledged her as your wife. She intends, however, that you shall now do so. She is, it seems, of a tender nature. She could not bring herself to look upon you while you were in captivity. Therefore she is awaiting me without. The point is right here: It has been discovered that the spot where you were arrested is just across the Bavarian frontier and upon Lusatian territory. The question arises: Could you be apprehended by Bavarian officials, in the kingdom of Lusatia, for an offense committed in the principality of Anheusen Schwartzburg?"

"But I was," said I.

"The fact, however, does not alter the law, Mein Herr. I have it from a reliable source that the privy council at this moment is in a state of mind over this identical business, and that a little influence in the right direction



would bring about your release this very night. Your estimable lady, as you know, is second cousin to the wife of Count Schnitzenwitz, the royal director of the Hof Brauerei. Frau von Dunkelheim, I am positive, has only to speak and this powerful nobleman will obtain your liberty within an hour. The authorities wish to act without publicity. They would simply open the doors and you would walk out."

"I will perform my part of it," said I.

"But there is something else," continued the counselor. "The lamentable coolness between yourself and your loving spouse must be accommodated, or I fear she will not act in the matter. You know that she is a lady of much force of character. She insists upon taking you home with her, when you are discharged, to her residence in the Sendlinger Strasse, opposite the church of St. Johannes."

"Can I have a look at her?" I asked.

“Certainly, Mein Herr. Though I do not think you will find her much changed. Step with me into the corridor and I will satisfy you.”

I did as he requested. We went a short distance down the hallway to a point where we could get a view of the visitors' room. There was a lady sitting there, with her profile toward us. She was a large and muscular woman of about forty-five, and would weigh two hundred pounds. Her face was rather masculine and wore a determined look, as well as many freckles. Her hair was red.

“Behold her!” he whispered.

## CHAPTER II.

I NOW saw why it was that Von Dunkelheim wished to change his identity and leave the country; also, why he was so thoroughly convinced that he had broken the unwritten law which he had mentioned. I touched the lawyer's arm, and we returned to my apartment.

"Unless the offense is a hanging matter," said I, "I would prefer to remain here and stand my trial."

"I fear it is," he answered.

"In that case," said I, "go ahead and do what you think best."

"Herr von Dunkelheim, you have decided wisely; though I confess that the alternative is not as attractive as it might be. In case we succeed, and I have no doubt of it, you will be released at or near midnight from the postern door of the establishment, which opens upon the Kerkerstrasse. Your better half will be waiting for you there, with a close carriage. You have my best wishes. I will now bid you good-night."

Herr Wittelsbach withdrew, and I was left alone with my thoughts. The advent of Frau von Dunkelheim was too much, and I was almost upon the point of renouncing my determination. Some mysterious influence within me, however, persuaded me to keep up my change of identity for a while longer; if for nothing else,

so that I might see what came of it. "I will escape her yet," thought I.

At some time before twelve o'clock, the turnkey again appeared and informed me that I was to be released. First, giving me back the several articles which had been taken from my pockets at my arrest, he led me through a number of corridors, up and down two or three stairways, through a damp and cobwebbed cellar or dungeon, which echoed with our footsteps, and then up another pair of stairs, into a small anteroom. Here he offered me a glass of beer, and, wishing to conciliate him, I drank it, but found it villainous stuff, with a very peculiar taste to it. He then opened a door and let me out into a gloomy street, a sort of *cul-de-sac*, which ended or commenced at the prison.

Two or three gas jets flickered near by and, as the door slammed behind me, a close carriage, standing about two hundred feet away, started up and came toward me. The street was so

narrow that I could scarcely pass it without being seen. It contained, undoubtedly, the fair Cunigunde. I glided hastily a little way toward it, keeping in the shadow of the houses, and looking for some place in which to conceal myself. There was, of course, no reason why I should have been alarmed, as she was in pursuit of a recreant husband, whom I did not resemble in the slightest particular. Strangely enough, though, I did not think of this, and my only idea was to evade her. As I was passing a large and stately stone mansion I noticed another close carriage, a sort of coupé, standing immediately in front of it, at the curb. It was empty, and it looked to me as though its driver had taken the horses from it and left it there for the night. It occurred to me, at once, that I could find no better hiding place. I therefore got into it without delay, and shutting the door after me, peered out through the glass at the conveyance of my pursuer, which, rattling

past me, took up a position at the curb some fifty feet away.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed. I now began to feel very tired and drowsy, which did not surprise me, as I had lain awake through almost the whole of the preceding night. I, however, still kept watch, through the back window of my coupé, on the enemy, and, twice or thrice, I saw the gorgon head of Cunigunde thrust forth from her carriage door as though she had become anxious and impatient.

Suddenly the door of a house a short way distant opened and a man came down the steps upon the sidewalk. As he passed into the light of the nearest lamp I got a clear view of his features. I was surprised beyond measure, for it was none other than August von Dunkelheim, the owner of my identity. He had made some changes in his dress and had enveloped himself in a voluminous cloak or mantle. He seemed to be engaged in meditation. He looked up in an

abstracted sort of manner, and, beholding his wife's carriage at the curb a short way ahead of him, he went toward it. He opened the door and placed his foot upon the step preparatory to getting in. Then he must have discovered its occupant, for he recoiled and gave utterance to an expression which I cannot set down upon paper. He was, however, too late, for a strong hand shot out of the carriage and seized him by the collar and snatched him bodily in. The door was banged shut and the vehicle rumbled away up the street.

It was the most ridiculous and comical thing that I had ever seen. The most complete justice had overtaken him, and I would have had a long laugh about it had I not been so oppressed with sleep. I fought against it, but it was of no avail. It was something abnormal. I had never felt that way before, and I could not wholly account for it. A bitter taste in my mouth, of which I now became suddenly conscious, gave me the

clew. That turnkey had been in league with Frau von Dunkelheim and her lawyer and had given me a drug in the beer. There could have been no better place for a good, sound, luxurious sleep than that deserted carriage. It was the most elegant vehicle which I had ever seen, and it was so full of rugs and robes and cushions that I was almost lost in them. I now sank down into one corner of it, and in less than a minute I was slumbering like the seven sleepers of Ephesus combined.

When I came to myself it was broad daylight, and, strange to say, I was no longer in the carriage, but stretched out comfortably in bed. A man was bending over me; a man with a clean-shaven face and the air of a very respectable and pampered menial.

"Your majesty has had an exceedingly good night's rest," said he.

"What!" said I.

"I would say, your majesty, that you have slept much better than is



your majesty's wont. I was told that your majesty had been troubled of late with insomnia."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am your majesty's new valet, Gottfried Johannes Hoffman. Your majesty will doubtless recollect that I was recommended to your majesty by his serene highness, the Prince of Saxe Weinberg Gotha. I came three days ago, while your majesty was absent at Baireuth. Yesterday I was informed by your majesty's chamberlain, Baron Winegerode, that your majesty would return at night; that your majesty would go immediately from the station to the house of the banker Goldschmidt, in the Kerkerstrasse; and that I was to call for your majesty there, at eleven o'clock, in order to give your majesty a pleasant surprise, with your majesty's new electrical coupé, which had just come from your majesty's wagon-maker."

"What in thunder are you talking about?" I cried.

“Your majesty’s new horseless carriage, which runs with electricity. I went with it to Banker Goldschmidt’s house at eleven, together with Casper Spielhagen, your majesty’s new motor man. The instructions were that we were not to ring the bell, but wait until your majesty came out. After waiting three-quarters of an hour, we thought it best to go into the next street and telephone the palace, to find if we might ring. Casper and I left the coupé, and, together, we went to the corner of the Schillingstrasse. I then sent him to the telephone, while I stood on the corner and looked back at the banker’s house and the coupé. It was then that I saw your majesty come out and get into the carriage. When we returned we found your majesty already fast asleep. We rode to the palace, and, not wishing to disturb your majesty’s slumber, carried your majesty’s person to your majesty’s yellow bedroom; where, removing your majes-

ty's outer clothing and shoes, I put your majesty to bed."

I thought, at this, that I had, by some hocus-pocus, been juggled into an asylum for the insane, and that I was being addressed by one of the inmates; but a look around the chamber at once satisfied me of my error. It was a large and stately apartment, decorated and furnished in the most extreme and fantastic rococo style. Everything—the artistic frescoes of the walls and ceiling, the damask and oak of the movables, the silks of the portières and the velvet upon the floor—was of yellow, shaded from the lightest of canary to the deepest of saffron. I glanced at the man's face, and acknowledged to myself that he had nothing of the lunatic in his make-up. He was a man of forty to forty-five, sleek in his appearance and orderly in his movements, and with a face the expression of which was an imperturbable knavery.

I raised myself and sat upon the edge of the bed and cogitated. There

was truly something reasonable in what he said. I remembered the horseless carriage, which I had imagined an ordinary coupé from which the horses had been taken. I remembered the luxuriousness of it, and how I had appropriated it and fallen asleep, under the influence of the turnkey's drug. The man, according to his own account, had been in the palace but three days, and was a stranger to his majesty. It might well be that he had really made this egregious and laughable blunder, and brought me to the palace in lieu of the king. But, pshaw! It was too preposterous. I could not believe it.

While I had been meditating Gottfried Johannes had not remained idle, but had busied himself about my person; and I now found myself incased in a suit of pale blue pajamas of India silk, marvelously embroidered in an endless repetition of old gold, with the royal crown and arms. I arose, and, crossing the chamber to an open window, thrust out my head that I

might reconnoiter the surroundings. There was a beautiful public garden immediately below me, and on either side of my window extended the carved and polished walls of a magnificent and kingly structure. I knew it at a glance, for I had before visited and admired it. It was, in truth, the royal palace, the new residence, constructed by Maximilian II. I also perceived that the chamber which I occupied was in that part of the building devoted to the private uses of his majesty. I now began, though much against my will, to be convinced of my valet's story. But, what had become of the king himself? Was he still in Baireuth? Or had he returned, and was he at this very moment in the palace, spying upon me through some peephole and convulsing himself with laughter at my perplexity.


My first impulse was to get away. But how was I to do so in my present costume? Pajamas, though sky blue, would do very well in the streets of

Calcutta, but would cause a riot, at least, in the thoroughfares of Munich.

"Gottfried," said I; "what have you done with the clothing which you removed from my person yesterday evening?"

"Your majesty will pardon me if I remind your majesty that to-day is the day of the month upon which, by your majesty's orders, all of your majesty's wardrobe is divided among your majesty's retainers in the palace, and among the reduced gentlefolk of the city. This act of largesse was performed at eight o'clock this morning, and it is now past two in the afternoon. The garments which your majesty mentions, which, by the bye, were somewhat travel-stained, were included in the distribution. The articles and the money which your majesty had upon your majesty's person I have placed yonder, in the upper drawer of your majesty's escritoire."

While Gottfried Johannes was speaking my gaze chanced to rest



upon his trousers. They were of a gray tweed, and I recognized them immediately as my own. It was thus that the rogue had profited by the largesse of the king.

"You rascal!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that I have nothing but these pajamas?"

"God forbid, your majesty! I will immediately bring your majesty the catalogue of your majesty's wardrobe for the present month."

Saying this, he bowed himself out of a door at the further end of the apartment. I now took the opportunity to open the *escritoire* and to ascertain if my property was safe. I was relieved to find that my money was intact. The papers of Julius Waterbury were also there, and among them a photograph—the photograph of the king, which had been shown me by Von Dunkelheim, and which bore such a striking resemblance to that individual. I now noticed that the expression of the face was somewhat different from that

arch rascal's. It was a preoccupied and speculative expression, quite different from his look when we had met; and, while gazing at the picture, a new light broke suddenly upon me. I saw it all in the tenth part of a second: It was not Von Dunkelheim who had been kidnaped by Cuni-gunde. It was the king!

### CHAPTER III.

I REASONED it all out in less time than it takes to tell it. I went further. I decided instantly upon my course of action, and laid what plans were necessary for my designs. The king was, perhaps, in danger. His abduction by this muscular and strong-minded female, who probably even now persisted in believing him to be her lawful spouse, would render him an object of ridicule. Kings have been forced to abdicate for less. During the short time while I remained in power I would be every inch a king. I would rescue Wil-



helm Otto from the termagant and, at the same time, preserve his secret. By doing so I would best protect myself, for, if the story came out, no one would be in more danger from his resentment than I. For I alone was privy to his absurd misfortune, and I had, though unwittingly and involuntarily, ascended the throne from which he had been snatched.

Hoffman now returned with the catalogue of the new royal wardrobe. It was a good-sized pamphlet of a dozen pages, bound in strong board covers. I took it from him, opened it, and ran it over. Several pages were taken up with robes and gowns and mantles appropriate to different state occasions. They did not take my fancy. There were then several pages of military uniforms, masonic and other regalia. His majesty must have belonged to every military company and secret society in Europe. I would have none of these, either. What I wanted was a good, plain, business suit. Finally, I came to a

page of golf suits, and I chose one of brownish-gray mixture, with stockings of rattlesnake design in black and yellow. It was No. 178, and I bade Gottfried bring it for me.

"You will pardon me, your majesty, for having to mention it, but, by some error in the arrangements, some mistake in the hour, your majesty's wardrobe for the present month was ordered for four o'clock in the afternoon, and it will not arrive at the palace before then."

I threw the catalogue at his head and had the good fortune to strike him squarely upon the nose with it. He picked it up from the floor and thanked me for the attention.

"Will your majesty hold an audience this afternoon?" he now asked.


"Do I look like it, you rascal?" I roared. "There will be no audience to-day, and I will see no one—absolutely no one—with the exception of yourself. Sirrah! Knave, do you mark me?"

"I do, your majesty. But your

majesty will excuse me if I mention the fact that your majesty's prime minister, Count von Löwenkopf, the near-sighted little old man with the blue spectacles and the brown wig, has been waiting in the anteroom beyond the audience chamber since a quarter past seven this morning. He is stamping around in a very impatient manner, and I heard him declare as I passed through the anteroom, that unless he saw his majesty at once he would not answer for the continuance of his majesty's dynasty."

"His majesty's dynasty be—— But, stay, my good Gottfried Johannes, what was it that thou didst remark about the near-sightedness of my prime minister?"

"Near-sighted, I said, your majesty; but I should have said purblind. For the old gentleman can scarce see a yard before his nose. I already knew it from hearsay, and, as I passed him but a moment ago, I found it out for myself; for, seeing me pass by with the catalogue, he mistook me



for your majesty's confessor and bade me shrive your majesty in a hurry, that your majesty's kingdom might not be meanwhile lost."

"Gottfried, we will also make an exception of our prime minister, and you may admit him presently to my bedroom. But first tell me if there be others in waiting."

"Surely there are, your majesty. A round dozen, at the least—tradesmen, for the most part, who have brought their accounts with them. There is also a young lady there, a mere girl, and wonderfully handsome. She is tall and has great blue eyes. She insists upon seeing your majesty, and she seems proud as Lucifer, but I think the jade was weeping now and then."

"Go out, Gottfried, and bring in Count von Löwenkopf. Order the tradesmen to return here this day month, and take the young lady one side and tell her kindly—most kindly, mark you—to come here again this afternoon at precisely four o'clock;

also to keep up a good heart and to trust in his majesty. Furthermore, you will ascertain her name, and whether I have a personal acquaintance with her."

"Your majesty shall be obeyed. But will your majesty first tell me what is to be done with your majesty's new secretary?"

"My new secretary! Who and where is he?"

"His name is Müller, your majesty, and he is, at present, waiting in your majesty's malachite dressing closet, just outside of your majesty's bedroom."

"How dared you admit him to my apartments without my permission?" demanded I of the trembling valet.

"Forgive me, your majesty. But I did not admit him. I met him coming in, as I went toward the audience chamber. I stopped him and told him he must go out again, as your majesty was within. He looked at me quickly and very much surprised, and said: 'Are you sure?' 'I have

just left his majesty,' said I. 'Who are you?' said he. I told him. Then he asked: 'When did his majesty return?' I gave him an account of the matter. He then thought a while, and said that he was your majesty's new secretary, Müller, recommended to your majesty by his highness, Prince Ernest of Anheusen Schwartzburg; that he had just arrived in the city this morning, and that he would await your majesty's pleasure where he was."

I was very much relieved to find that my new secretary was a stranger to the palace and to the person of his master. It was wonderful how things were coming my way. A new valet, a new secretary, and a half-blind prime minister. Nothing was now wanting to put the wheels of government in motion. If I could not run the kingdom now it would be my own fault.

"Bring my secretary in at once," said I to Hoffman.

At the end of the room stood a

large fauteuil, framed of brass and upholstered with richly brocaded yellow damask. I seated myself in it, draped around my person an Oriental slumber robe, and lighted an Egyptian cigarette. The door opened and Gottfried appeared with my new secretary, Müller. He was a youngish man of about my own age; a rather distinguished-looking individual, dressed quietly and in extreme good taste, with keen gray eyes, good features, a well-trimmed beard, and an erect carriage. He looked at me inquiringly, almost searchingly, for a moment; then made me a most respectful obeisance. If the truth must be told, I felt somewhat uneasy under his glance, and I would have sworn, for a moment, that he knew more than was shown by his impassive face.

After he had introduced himself and had detailed his credentials, I bade him seat himself at the *escritoire*, that he might take down the memoranda of the interview which I

was about to have with the prime minister. Hoffman, meanwhile, who had gone to the anteroom, returned with this dignitary, and ushered him into my august presence.

It is unnecessary to describe Count von Löwenkopf, as Gottfried Johannes has already done so. He came bustling into the chamber as though the palace were on fire. In his haste and his short-sightedness he advanced too far and almost stumbled into my lap.

"Good-morrow, count," said I with admirable indolence.

"Good-morrow, your majesty," he answered in a harsh and piping voice, at the same time blinking at me through his glasses in such a manner that I was assured he would not have known me if I had been his own son.

"Would that I could have seen your majesty yesterday!" he continued.

"It is just as well that you did not," I answered dryly.

"Your majesty shall judge for



yourself; but, while I think to mention it, your majesty's voice is strangely hoarse this morning. I hope that it is nothing serious."

"There is nothing serious about it," said I.

"I am glad to hear your majesty say so. In fact, I notice a vast improvement in your majesty's looks this morning."

"I do feel very much changed," said I.

At that moment my secretary, Müller, emitted a sort of gasp or hic-cough. I turned toward him sharply, and he commenced to cough. Had the fellow been laughing at me? I could not tell; but I decided he would bear watching. I now ordered my valet to place a chair for the prime minister. I had noticed that his attenuated legs were scarcely proportioned to support the weight of his pear-shaped body; and I had read, somewhere, that one could not sit down in the presence of royalty without being bidden.

"And now, my dear Von Löwenkopf," I continued, "we will get down to business. You are the bearer, I hear, of evil tidings. Cut them short, for my time is limited."

"Ah, your majesty! You have then heard about it?"

"If I had heard of it I would not be listening to you now."

"That is true. Your majesty is always right. The unfortunate intelligence which I have to communicate to your majesty is that the chamber of deputies is still sitting."

"Let them sit!" said I. "Would you have them stand?"

"A very good *bon mot*, your majesty. The condition of things, however, is extremely serious. The most treasonable and inflammatory speeches have been made. The abdication of your majesty has even been hinted at."

"Let them hint!" said I. "The king will not abdicate, if he knows himself."

"Well said, your majesty! The

worst of the matter is, however, that they refuse to grant the tax on Leberwurst; a tax which would bring us in three hundred thousand florins."

"Ah! that is, indeed, a hanging matter," I exclaimed. "Why have you not surrounded the chamber with the royal guard, and thus intimidated them into passing the measure?"

"The royal guard, sire, is in a state of mutiny, for the reason that they have not been paid in ten months. They would, without doubt, side with the deputies."

"Pay them, then, and let them clear the chamber this very day."

"Sire, you are pleased to jest. Your majesty knows that there is not a groschen in the treasury; nor will there be without the tax on Leberwurst. Which brings us around to the beginning again."

"If the worst comes to the worst, my good count, we will make an assignment. Have you any other pleasant tidings to communicate?"

"Would that I could say no, sire; but the direst misfortune is to come. This morning an envoy extraordinary, in the person of Baron Kranzen, has arrived from the King of Lusatia with the preposterous complaint that his master's territory has been invaded by certain officers in your majesty's service. For this he demands the immediate payment of an indemnity of two hundred thousand florins. It is some absurd matter about the arrest of one August von Dunkelheim on Lusatian soil. The baron knows the mutinous inclination of your majesty's army, and evidently is using this absurd pretext to force your majesty into a war, in which case, in the present state of things, ruin is inevitable."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"That is all for the present, sire."

"What is the reason," thought I, "that everything happens in this pestiferous kingdom the moment I commence my reign?"

With my usual promptness, I de-

cided at once upon a means of averting the calamity.

"We must commence," said I, "with the royal guard. They must be satisfied, no matter in what way. With the royal guard we will then intimidate the deputies, and force them to grant the tax. We will then have funds enough to pay the army, and will be able to wear a bold front toward the king of Lusatia. The question is, how shall we satisfy the royal guards?"

"That is the question, sire," responded the prime minister despondently.

"I have it!" I exclaimed. "We will have broached for them the famous tun of Munich beer, in the Hof Brauerei. That gigantic hogshead, that Riesenfass, which is said to hold twenty-four thousand quarts or liters."

## CHAPTER IV.

"BUT we must pay for it, your majesty. Your uncle, the prince, as you know, is the chief owner of the company, and he draws a tight purse-string. I doubt if he will give credit for it. Where then, is the money to come from?"

"Take," said I to the new secretary, Müller, "the price of this commodity at wholesale, and figure out the value of the twenty-four thousand liters."


"It is worth, your majesty," he answered, "about twelve pfennigs the liter, which would bring the value of the twenty-four thousand liters to about three thousand marks."

"And what is the present muster of the royal guards?" I asked.

"At present, sire, the number is something scant of three thousand."

"Which would give," said I, "something like eight liters or quarts to a man. This must satisfy them,

or they are insatiate. As for the money, I will supply it from my own private purse. I have a sum equal to about three thousand marks in my escritoire. Take it, Count von Löwenkopf, and use it in the manner I have pointed out. Let the guard be drawn up in front of the brewery at four o'clock. Serve them each one of those large steins of half a liter. As fast as they are served let them march up the Maximilian Strasse, thence, upon the Residence Strasse, past the Chamber of Deputies and around the Court Garden Strasse in front of my royal palace, and so, back to the Hof Brauerei, where they are to be again served with a half liter stein; and so on, until the great cask is empty. In this way there will be an endless procession of the royal guards upon these four streets for several hours. At the commencement of the ceremony you will post the Lusatian envoy extraordinary at a convenient window of the palace, whence he may look out upon the



marching troops, take note of their loyalty, and count their numbers. As they will pass the window sixteen times, it will seem to him that there are forty-eight thousand of them. You will finally surround the Chamber of Deputies with my guards, who will, at that time, have arrived at such a pitch of enthusiasm that they will intimidate the deputies into granting the tax, and then clear the chamber of them. You may now retire. I have bothered enough with the matter, and I have not yet breakfasted."

"It is a most wonderful strategy, your majesty," exclaimed the minister; "a brilliant *coup d'état*. I would not have thought of it. Machiavelli would not have been in it with your majesty. I must now beg of you, sire, to give me the necessary order for having the guards out."

"Write the order, Herr Müller," said I to the secretary.

He wrote out the document, and then asked:

"Will your majesty sign it?"



I was on the point of doing so, when it suddenly occurred to me that a man in my town had once signed another man's name to a piece of paper, and that he was even now boarding at the expense of the state for it.

"No," said I, "it is not necessary. My seal is sufficient. Here is my signet ring."

Saying this, I took my seal ring from my finger and gave it to him. He examined it for a moment.

"I see, your majesty," said he, "that it is simply cut with the initials 'S. P,' or 'P. S.' Would such a signature to the document be quite in order?"

"Certainly, Herr Secretary Müller. It is easily seen that you are new to the business. The letters, 'P. S.,' stand for '*pro signo*,' which rendered into German, means 'to sign with.'"

My prime minister now took the order and the three thousand marks, and, not without some trouble, bowed himself out of the apartment. I im-

mediately called Gottfried to me, and asked him about the young lady.

"I have talked with her, your majesty," he answered, "and I have also inquired about her of a person who was near her in the antechamber. Her name is Valeska Maria Claudia von Englehard. She was left an orphan, with a large fortune, at an early age, and has been living with an uncle, the brother of her father, at Nürnberg. This uncle, according to many, is a villain, and would compel her, against her will, to marry a certain Baron von Rabenstein, a general in your majesty's service; a man almost three times her own age, and, withal, of an unsavory reputation for dissipation and gallantry. Whereby, she has lately run away from her uncle's house at Nürnberg, and has taken refuge with an aunt, in this, your majesty's, city of Munich. Finding that the baron has discovered her whereabouts, and fearing, from certain indications, that he is preparing by force to abduct her, she

has decided to apply directly to your majesty for protection. She has never seen your majesty, but relies upon your majesty's well-known goodness and chivalry."

"And very properly and wisely, Gottfried. But, did you address her as I bade you, and did you request her to return at four?"

"I did, your majesty. It was, however, already a quarter of three; and they decided that they would not stir, but would wait in the antechamber until the hour came round."

"They!" asked I. "Are there, then, more than one of them?"

"The maiden and her aunt, Frau Reinhold, your majesty. I forgot to say that her aunt was with her."

"It would have been better if you had forgotten it altogether," said I.

It was now but three o'clock. The unfortunate and lovely Valeska was waiting for me but a few paces distant, while I was closely prisoned in my bedroom by that unfortunate largesse of the king and the non-

arrival of the royal wardrobe. I now bathed and breakfasted, taking pains to spend as much time about it as was possible, and, at length, had the satisfaction of hearing the bells of a neighboring cathedral chime four o'clock and of seeing Gottfried appear with the long-wished-for golf suit.

I now passed into a small audience chamber or office, contiguous to my bedroom, and ordered Gottfried Johannes to introduce the ladies and to guard the apartment from interruption. He went away, and, in a few moments, ushered into my presence an ancient, buxom, and good-natured-looking spinster, and a beautiful young girl of eighteen or nineteen years of age.

She was one of the most perfect creatures I had ever seen. She was of medium height and of well-developed outlines, but, at the same time, slender and lithe as a naiad. I was sitting beside a nobly carved desk of teak and ivory. She glided across

the floor, and, before I could hinder it, knelt at my feet and seized my hand. A tress of her heavy, rich brown locks strayed down upon the marvelous whiteness of her brow. I pushed it back into its place, and, letting my fingers loiter for a moment in the soft tangles of her hair, I gazed into her pretty and ethereal face, with its great, clear blue eyes, its arched and quivering lips and its dimpled chin.

"You will protect me, will you not, your majesty?" she said.

"Will I?" I cried. "I will not do a thing else."

I now recollected the old lady and bowed to her. "Rise, my child!" said I, as I lifted up Valeska, and placed a chair for her quite near me. "It is not fitting that so charming a maid should sue on bended knee. From beauty such as yours, we kings expect commands, and not supplications."

"Your majesty is altogether too good and courteous. How can a



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"BEFORE I COULD HINDER IT SHE KNELT AT MY  
FEET."—P. 214.

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wild and disobedient girl, such as I, deserve it? But I could not marry him. Indeed, I could not."

"Neither shall you marry him, my child."

"You are too kind, your majesty, to say so. But you know my story, then?"

"I do, in fact, my little one. We potentates have means of information that you know not of. I am aware, for instance, that the object of your fear and detestation is a certain Baron von R., a military gentleman, who is almost old enough to be your grandfather. Compose yourself, and have no further anxiety about the matter, for I will this very day issue an order that will send him to Russia or to Constantinople for a year or two."

"How delightful that will be!" she exclaimed, while she gazed at me gratefully. "Do you know, your majesty, that you are not at all as I supposed you would be. You are not as old, and you are infinitely more—I cannot express myself as



I would wish, but I am almost sorry that you are a king."

"We have to put up with the disadvantage of royalty," said I. "There are many inconveniences attached to the position. For instance, if a king wishes to marry, he cannot wed the maiden of his choice. He has nothing whatever to say about the matter, and his bride, some ugly royal princess of a neighboring state, is selected for him by his ministers."

"And do you mean to say, sire," she exclaimed, "that you can never marry for love?"

"I have never been able to do so," I answered. "I will say, however, that if any of my line ever marries for love, it will be I. I will also say this: that I have never felt the weight of these restrictions as I have felt it since gazing upon your charming face."

I accompanied this remark with a tender glance, and she received it with the divinest of blushes. My interesting visitor now arose to go.

"I shall be so relieved, your majesty," said she, "when the order which your majesty spoke of, is put into effect, and that villainous monster is far away. While he is here, I am continually apprehensive. I am sure that he followed us, in a close carriage, as we drove to the palace. I am certain that he will shadow us, on our return to my aunt's house."

"The execrable scoundrel!" I exclaimed. "I shall, myself, accompany you to your aunt's house, and the order shall immediately thereafter be put into execution. I shall take you home in my own coupé, and it will be an unlucky day for the baron, if he crosses our path."

"Your majesty is everything that is noble and sweet and generous," cried the lovely girl, while her magnificent eyes glistened with moisture, and a single tear-drop stole down across her velvet cheek.

I took her small white hand in mine and gently patted it.

"Tut, tut, my dear child!" said I.

"You make a mountain out of the merest trifle. Compose yourself and wait for me here. I will return for you in a few moments."

Saying this, I left Valeska, and proceeded to my yellow bedroom, where I found Secretary Müller sitting, as I had left him, at the *escritoire*. I told him that I intended to take the ladies to their house in my horseless coupé, and bade him get ready to go with us.

"I am very glad that I am permitted to do so, your majesty," said he, "as I have long been desirous of trying one of these carriages."

I now sent Gottfried Johannes to the royal *écurie* with a request that the electrical coupé should be at once brought to the most private entrance of the palace. During his absence I dictated to Müller an order addressed to the minister of war commanding him to send General Baron von Rabenstein by the first train in the morning to Constantinople, where he was to wait until he received

sealed instructions. This business was no sooner expedited than my valet returned with the information that the vehicle was in readiness. We now rejoined Valeska and her aunt, and, preceded by Gottfried, passed through an almost interminable number of halls and corridors and suites, and at length, issuing forth from a small and secluded exit at the rear of the palace, took our places in the coupé.

The ladies were upon the inside and Müller and I were upon the box. I proposed to run the thing myself. I possessed some knowledge of electrical matters, and I had once run a trolley car all the way from Holyoke to Springfield. I wish to say, however, that it was as a dilettante, and not as a professional. We started off very smoothly as soon as I had moved the lever, and, turning into the Hof Garden Street, we ran the length of it and came into the street of the Residence.

## CHAPTER V.

IN this street there was quite a crowd of people who were watching the marching of a body of troops. I did not know what they were doing at first, but, Müller remarking something about the fine appearance of the royal guard, it occurred to me that it was the very procession which I myself had set in motion, and that the operation of emptying the great tun of Munich beer had been begun. It was now about five o'clock, and the soldiers, who were now passing us, had made about four rounds, and had, consequently swallowed about two liters or quarts to the man. They certainly looked it. They came on with a joyous and eager swinging step, and now and then I heard the shout among them: "Long live the king!"

The house of Valeska's aunt was in the Ludwig suburb, outside of the Sendlinger gate. The natural

approach to it, of course, was by the Sendlinger Strasse. I was glad of this, because it would take us past the house of Cunigunde von Dunkelheim. I wished to reconnoiter this house while it was yet daylight, for I intended to make an assault upon it that very night, and to liberate, if it lay within my power, from durance vile and from the unbearable attentions of that she crocodile, his Christian majesty, Wilhelm Otto the First.

I was determined now to unbosom myself to Müller. There was nothing to be gained by longer keeping up the imposture, and I wished to enlist him, heart and soul, in my enterprise. When we had entered that long and delightful avenue and were gliding along at a ten-mile pace over the smooth asphalt, I turned to the secretary and said:

“Herr Müller, I have a secret to communicate to you. Prepare for one of the greatest surprises of your life. I am not the king.”

"I thought that you were not," said he, without betraying the least astonishment.

"Since when did you come to that conclusion?" I asked.

"From the beginning," he answered.

I looked at him curiously. Here was a man whom I could never understand. He did not manifest the least interest or emotion about the matter. It was evidently all the same to him, whether I was Stuyvesant Perkins, Esquire, or his majesty, Wilhelm Otto.

I now swore him, by the most binding oaths, to secrecy; and then narrated to him, in as few words as possible, the whole course of events, from the time I met Von Dunkelheim, to the moment when I awoke and found myself a monarch. He agreed with me as to the pernicious effects of allowing the story of the king's absence to become public, and, furthermore, pledged himself to aid me, with heart and hand, in my

attempt, that night, to free his majesty from the power of the too affectionate Cunigunde.

"Herr Perkins," said he, "you are a good fellow, and an honest man. You are a stranger; but you are accomplishing prodigies in the king's behalf. If all his subjects were like you, his kingdom would be a unique one. There would be nothing at all like it upon the face of the earth. Believe me when I say that I am sorry, from the bottom of my heart, that you are not really and indeed the king. You have a peculiar genius for the business, a genius which is lacking with most of the crowned heads of Europe."

We were passing, just at that moment, the church of St. Johannes. I glanced at the buildings across the way, and saw that there was but one house which could be said to be exactly opposite the church. It was, without doubt, the castle of the redoubtable amazon. It was an ancient brick edifice, all of the front



windows of which were closed with heavy wooden shutters. It had the look, truly, of a prison, and its melancholy and well-fortified appearance, while boding ill for our enterprise, made us more anxious to begin it without delay.

A few minutes afterward we passed through the Sendlinger gates and arrived at our destination in the Ludwig suburb. My parting with Valeska was hard to bear. I had become, in that short space of time, monstrously fond of her, and, from the nature of things, I could, of course, never expect to see her more.

"Your majesty will surely take tea with us?" said she, with a pleading look upon her mournful and charming face.

"Another time, Fräulein von Englehard," I replied; though I knew that I was lying. "*Au revoir*, and may Heaven protect you!"

I raised her soft hand and kissed it reverently. In a moment more I felt that I should have to clasp her to

me. I, therefore, tore myself away, mounted the box, and we were off.

It was wonderful how well I adapted myself to the vehicle. It obeyed my slightest will. The hand upon the dial in front of me, besides the voltage, indicated the rate of speed at which the coupé was running; provision being made for a velocity as high as twenty-five miles an hour. Twice or thrice I made a spurt and went the limit. What a revelation it would have been to the son of Nimshi!

The avenue was quite well filled with carriages and pedestrians, which made necessary considerable skill in steering. We frightened several horses into running away, ran over a dog, and took a wheel off a passing cabriolet. Aside from these trifles, however, nothing occurred to mar the pleasure of the ride.

When we arrived in the Theatiner Strasse we were again confronted with that everlasting procession of the royal guards. It was now six

o'clock, and they must have made the circuit eight or nine times.

I now noticed that a great many outsiders had joined themselves to the troops and were marching with them. The air was continually rent with shouts of "Hoch der König!" "His majesty forever!" and "Down with the deputies!" "It is wonderful what three thousand marks will do," thought I.

As we came around by the bank, to get into the street of the Hof Garten, we found the crowd so dense that it was utterly impossible to force a passage. On this account we were constrained to remain perfectly immovable for the better part of an hour. Finally, there was a movement of the populace toward the square of Maxmilian Joseph. For a moment there was an opening in the crowd before us, and we quickly took advantage of it, and in two or three minutes found ourselves in the rear of the palace, at the small private entrance which we had previously used.

It was now almost seven o'clock in the evening, and the darkness was beginning to settle down. We found Gottfried Johannes waiting for us upon the steps.

"Your majesty is wanted immediately at the telephone!" he cried.

"Take me to it," said I.

He led me through a long, dimly-lighted corridor and into a small office. I took down the receiver and applied it to my ear.

"Hello!" said I.

"Hello! your majesty," came back in a shrill female voice.

"Who is talking?" said I.

"He has gone off with her, your majesty!" shrieked the voice.

"Who has gone off with whom, and what is it to me?" I shouted.

"It was half an hour ago, and I have been trying to call up your majesty ever since."

"Well, who are you, and what do you want me to do about it?"

"Can your majesty not save her?"

"Save her?" I shouted back, in desperation. "Save whom?"

"My niece Valeska, your majesty. Did I not say he had run off with her?"

It dawned upon me that I was talking with Frau Reinhold, and that she was conveying to me the information that my angelic *protégée* had been, in some manner, abducted by the villainous Von Rabenstein. I was so overpowered by the intelligence that I expressed myself somewhat emphatically.

"Oh, oh; your majesty! How can your majesty talk so horribly?"

"I will be with you in less than a quarter of an hour," said I.

With that I put up the receiver and hastened out. I found Secretary Müller smoking a pipe upon the box of the coupé. I took my place beside him, and immediately put the vehicle in motion. I chose the back streets, and, avoiding the more crowded thoroughfares, arrived at the dwelling of Frau Reinhold in less

time than I had promised her. On the way I told Müller what had happened. He did not show the least surprise, but entered into my plans coolly and as a matter of course. He was truly a singular individual.

We found Frau Reinhold in great distress of mind. She informed us that, about three-fourths of an hour after we had left them, her niece and she had stepped from the house with the intention of visiting an apothecary's shop in the neighborhood. As they passed a close-covered barouche, which was drawn up at the curb, the door of it suddenly opened, General von Rabenstein darted out upon the walk, threw some sort of blanket over the head and shoulders of Valeska, and sprang, with the struggling girl in his arms, into the carriage; which was at once driven furiously away. The whole thing had been done so quickly and neatly that the few pedestrians within the street had not noticed it. She, herself had been so utterly surprised

that when it occurred to her to cry out the vehicle was already a long distance away. It had gone down the Sendlinger country road, which takes a southeasterly direction from the city. Of the equipage itself she recollected no distinctive features, save that one of the horses was white and the other bay, and that the coachman had a yellow handkerchief wound round his neck.

These were meager clues to follow, but I bundled the old lady into the coupé and we started in pursuit of the barouche at a breakneck rate of speed. It was a quarter of seven when the unfortunate girl had been stolen, and it was now a quarter-past the hour. They could not very well travel at a greater rate than eight miles an hour; consequently, they had four miles the start of us. By half-past seven they would have traveled two miles further, or six miles in 'all. At that point I would certainly overtake them, as I had pulled the lever around to its fullest extent, and

we were plunging along at the rate of twenty-five miles an hour.

It was a fine macadamized road, and all the conditions were favorable for the greatest amount of speed. We had, however, to cross several bridges and to dodge quite a number of vehicles; the result being that many times we rode upon two wheels only, and twice or thrice we ricocheted along for some distance upon one wheel alone; our seat being at an angle of forty-five degrees with the road. It was very exhilarating and, under ordinary circumstances, I would have enjoyed it hugely. My thoughts now, however, were of nothing but Valeska.

When it still lacked two minutes of the half hour we overhauled an equipage which seemed to answer Frau Reinhold's description. It was getting quite dark, but there was still light enough to see that it was a heavy, close-covered barouche, that one horse was white and the other bay, and that the driver wore



the yellow handkerchief around his neck. This threefold combination made me quite sure of my ground. Diminishing the speed of my coupé, I came up close behind the barouche, relinquished the lever to Müller, and clambered up over the top of the abductor's carriage. I seized the coachman by the collar, plunged myself down by his side, and held Müller's large meerschaum pipe against his head.

"If you speak," said I, "I will blow the top of your head off."

He spoke not. Otherwise, I would have been placed in quite a predicament. I took the reins from him and brought the horses to a standstill.

"Get down," I commanded, "and make yourself scarce. The further you go the better you will find the air."

He leaped down to the ground with alacrity and in a twinkling disappeared over the hedge at the side of the road. The carriage door opened and a large, soldierly, middle-

aged man got out. I was on the ground to meet him as he came forth.

## CHAPTER VI.

"WHAT is the matter?" he bel-  
lowed.

"Are you General von Rabenstein?" I asked.

"Yes, d——n you, I am," he replied.

"You were," said I, as I gave him a terrible blow under the ear, with my whole weight back of it.

He dropped to the earth and lay there very peacefully, and in the most comfortable position. I went to the door of the general's carriage, and met Valeska just stepping out. She was extremely pale, and her blue eyes were wide with fright. When she saw me she gave a contented little sigh and sank into my arms.

Under the influence of my consoling and reassuring words she quickly recovered her strength and spirits. I now found how buoyant and elastic

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was her nature, as I saw her, in a few moments, pass from a state of frantic despair to one of cheerful and mischievous gayety. She even insisted upon riding with me upon the box of the coupé; and I was in a quandary as to how I should dispose of Müller, until I found that it was all one with him whether he rode upon the box or upon the inside with the old lady. He was truly an accommodating person, and I would have liked to advance him in some way, if I had known how to do so.

We had determined to take the ladies directly to the palace, and to leave them there under the charge of Gottfried Johannes, while we stormed the castle of Cunigunde and rescued his majesty. I had not forgotten, by any means, this all-important enterprise; and, though there was no longer necessity for such momentum as we had used in the pursuit of Von Rabenstein, I whirled the carriage along at a very respectable speed.

My intimacy with Valeska was rendered closer, more confidential, and more amicable by the delightfully cozy and agreeable situation in which we now found ourselves.

"Why is it," said I, "that you were so unalterably opposed to the general's suit? The match would be a brilliant one for almost any girl. Can it be that you entertained a prior affection for someone else?"

"No, your majesty."

"Do you mean to tell me, Fräulein Valeska, that you have never been in love?"

"I did not say that, your majesty."

"Then you confess, child, that you are in love with someone?"

The artless and amiable creature hung her head, and a very rosy hue mantled her lovely cheek and perfect neck.

"Valeska, fair one, tell me, does not the insensible clod return thy affection?"

"I do not know, your majesty," she answered faintly. "He might,


perhaps, if things were different. He is so immeasurably removed from me by wealth and rank that it is, alas! impossible for him to think of me."

"But suppose, girl, that all his rank and power had vanished; that he had suddenly become poor and humble, would you love him still?"

"I would love him, though he were a beggar!" cried Valeska with enthusiasm.

After we had set down Valeska and her aunt at the palace, and just as we were preparing to start upon our adventurous expedition, I was handed a note by Gottfried Johannes. It was from my prime minister Count von Löwenkopf, and read as follows:

"The enthusiasm of the troops is unprecedented. The chamber has already granted the tax. Your minister for foreign affairs has concluded a settlement of the Von Dunkelheim affair with the Lusatian envoy upon the most favorable terms, without



paying him a gulden, and the beer is not all gone yet. Long live your majesty!"

I naturally felt somewhat elated at the success of my stratagem and was not a little proud that I had shown such genius in affairs of government. Mounting once more the box of our matchless coupé I set free the electric fluid, and in a few minutes we had arrived at the house in the Sendlinger Strasse opposite the Church of St. Johannes; the house which we had too much reason to suppose was even now the prison of the unfortunate monarch.


Müller was for breaking into the house through some window in the rear.

"Yes," said I, "and get four years for burglary. I know a way worth two of that."

The sill of the house door was but a few inches above the level of the sidewalk. The wheels of our carriage had pneumatic tires, and, pro-

jecting beyond the wheels in front of the vehicle there was a sort of rubber buffer or bumper of great solidity. I gave the guiding wheel a slight twist to the right, the coupé shot obliquely across the street, passed over the curb, traversed the sidewalk and crashed against the heavy door. The effect was all that I wished for. The door fell inward in splinters; screams came from the interior of the mansion, and the pedestrians who were upon the street began to hasten toward the scene. I got down from the box and was just in time to meet the enraged Cunigunde in the doorway. Her wrath was indescribable and her vocabulary complete and ornate. Behind her commanding and wildly gesticulating figure I caught a glimpse of a familiar but somewhat pale and emaciated face. It was undoubtedly that of the poor captive king.

"Madame," said I, taking off my hat, "your mansion is on fire. The flames are even now coming through





"HER WRATH WAS INDESCRIBABLE."—P. 238.



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the roof. This is the new chemical engine. Get together at once your valuables and jewels, as we are about to flood the house."

A moment she was irresolute. Then she turned and rushed into the back of the house. I opened the door of the coupé, made a dash into the hallway for his majesty, and dragged him toward the entrance. To my surprise he resisted my good offices, so that I was obliged to use considerable force. He now began to fight and struggle like a madman, and at the same time showed such strength that I began to despair of getting him out before Cunigunde's return. The crowd and the tumult outside were increasing.

There was no help for it. I at once put into execution the famous tackle for which I was so renowned when I played in our eleven at college. I squeezed the breath out of his body, doubled him up, flung him over my shoulder, made a rush for the street, and flung him, almost

senseless, into the depths of the vehicle.

To slam the door shut, mount the box, and turn the lever was the work of a moment. It was none too soon. Several of the bystanders caught hold of the wheels. Two or three of them turned complete somersaults by doing so, and the coupé passed on, like the car of Juggernaut.

Of course I regretted exceedingly the having to use such heroic measures with the Lord's anointed. But what could I do? My business was to rescue him, and I had done it in spite of himself. Müller had done nothing but laugh from the very commencement of the *mêlée*. Even when we arrived at the palace he was still so convulsed with inward merriment that I could get absolutely nothing out of him in the way of counsel. It was really quite *aggravating*, and I was much annoyed by it.

I had Müller get down and enter the palace by the front and main portico, as I wished him to see to it that

everything was in readiness for his majesty's reception, and that there were no loiterers in the rear passage way—so that we might bring him into the palace incognito and without occasioning any publicity or scandal.

I then ran the carriage around to the private entrance and waited for Müller to come down. Several minutes passed and he did not appear. I got down from the box and looked into the window of the coupé. I could not see very distinctly; so I opened the door. To my astonishment the vehicle was empty. His majesty had jumped from the carriage while it was in transit and had escaped. This, then, was the outcome of all my heroic endeavors.

While I was thinking what an idiot he had been, several forms closed around me out of the darkness. Two men seized my arms, and one of them cried:

“In the name of the king!”

“What am I arrested for?” I asked.

"For high treason," said he.


They now took me into the passage, led me up several stairways and through any number of corridors, and at last brought me into a large and brilliantly lighted chamber. At the further end of it were several officers, in gorgeous uniforms. One man alone among them was seated.

"Your majesty," spoke the officer who had arrested me, "this is the man."

"Let everyone withdraw," said the gentleman who was sitting. "I would be alone with the prisoner."

I now knew that he who spoke was the king. To say that I was astonished, confounded, and dumfounded, does not do justice to it. For the king was no other than my quondam secretary Müller.

I had never experienced such a transformation, upheaval, and reversal in my life before. All the day my feelings and my imagination had been upon an heroic plane. I now found that I had been nothing more



than the plaything of the king, and that my achievements, instead of being heroic, inclined rather to the ridiculous.

I recollected how I had patronized Müller and ordered him about, and I wondered what he would now do to me for it.

After the apartment had been cleared of all but his majesty and myself, he looked at me gravely for a moment or two and then began to laugh, just as he had laughed upon the coupé. I was not so much vexed about it now as I was then. I took it for a happy augury.

"Herr Perkins," said he at length, when he had laughed until he was purple in the face, "you are a most excellent young man, and you mean well, but I cannot laugh like this all the time. I would die of it. Were it not for this, I would keep you always near me in the palace. As it is, you may ask of me any reward you will, for the honest efforts you have put forth in my behalf and

for the amusement you have given me."


"I would like to ask your majesty first," said I, "to be so kind as to give me an explanation of the supposed resemblance between Herr von Dunkelheim and your majesty?"

"The explanation is," he replied, "that Von Dunkelheim is the worst liar in all Europe. He lied about the resemblance, and the terrible mauling which you gave him but a half hour since was his just reward. Have you, however, nothing to ask for but explanations?"

I was silent, for I dared not ask for the very thing I wanted most.

"It is well that I know what you want," said the king. "I see that I will have to give it to you without the asking."

Saying this, he arose and pushed back the portières from a doorway at one side of the chamber, and led into the room Valeska von Englehard, and placed her hand in mine. A winning smile was upon her lips



and a tender light in her eyes, and I knew that she was nothing loath.

"Take her, Herr Perkins," said his majesty, "and may you both live long and happily! Her dot amounts to more than a hundred thousand thalers, so neither of you will starve. Herr Perkins, you will call to-morrow upon my treasurer, and he will pay you thirty thousand marks, in lieu of the three thousand which you to-day employed in my service. You see that I am not, by any means, so hard up as that old dotard, Von Löwenkopf, would make me out."

**THE END.**







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